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The Political Church and the Profane State
in

John Milbank and William Cavanaugh

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Edinburgh.
2013

Declaration

I composed this thesis, the work is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

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Abstract

Contemporary political and public theology is predominantly statist, with a view of the state as the solver of human problems, and with the church urging the state to do more to bring about social justice and peace. This practice of politics as statecraft has been forcefully challenged by a number of recent theologians, such as those within the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy. Against such a backdrop, this thesis examines the work of two of Radical Orthodoxy's most political writers: John Milbank and William Cavanaugh. Their characterization of the state, as based in nominalist philosophy and violence, is highly negative. This negative assessment renders statist theologies and the practice of statecraft profane and deeply problematic for Christians. They prefer instead to see the church as the only true politics. Yet this move places their ecclesial and sacramental politics in the overall modern movement of the politicization of Christianity. This thesis argues that the state is neither sacred nor profane, but if accepted as mundane, it is something that can be freely engaged with by the church as part of its overall witness to politics and society. In order to outline and assess the political theology of Milbank and Cavanaugh three biblical and doctrinal lenses – creation, preservation, and redemption – are used to judge their work. From the viewpoint of creation we see where Milbank and Cavanaugh find the origins of the state in comparison with other theological positions. This carries through to the commonly held view that the state is in the order of preservation, as an ordinance of God preserving human society from the chaos caused by human sinfulness. Finally, in redemption we see how in both Milbank and Cavanaugh the state becomes an anti-redeemer in competition with the political salvation found in the church and voluntary associations. The thesis concludes by drawing on the work of Jacques Ellul in advocating the desacralization of the state from being either sacred or profane. Such a perspective enables the Church to freely engage in statecraft as just one tactic in its political advocacy without corrupting itself.

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A Note on the Text

The 'state'

I have followed the modern convention of spelling 'state' with a lower case 's'. In quotations from other authors I have preserved the spelling of 'state' as it appears in the original form, which in older texts sometimes has 'State'. In this regard I differ from the practice of David Runciman, the only contemporary author I have encountered that deals with the problem of the spelling of 'state'.¹ My practice harmonizes with Ludwig von Mises who suggested that liberals, unlike totalitarian statist, do not spell 'state' with a capital 'S'.²

Gendered language

I have avoided gender exclusive language in my writing. I have not, however, altered other authors' words, but preserved their original expression.

Scripture

The NRSV translation has been for all English bible quotations and citations unless otherwise stated. In the body of the text names of biblical books appear in full. In the few quotations from other authors that include a scripture citation I have amended the scripture reference style for consistency and indexing purposes.

1. David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xiii.

2. Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), v.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the vibrant field of political theology, the state remains a central concept around which debates turn. One's attitude to the state can have one condemned as a Constantinian, an anarchist, or as an apologist for violence. As a work of political theology, this thesis focuses on theological understandings of the state in North Atlantic theology from the late nineteenth century to today. But this is not a discussion of an abstract concept of the state, but rather how a theological assessment of the state relates to the church's engagement with the state.

As discussed in the following chapters, this period was characterised by the rise of a very favourable disposition among many theologians toward the state. This attitude is characterized by the notion that the state is the principal means to bring about a more virtuous, peaceful, and just society. However, this view of the state within political theology has come in for hard criticism, with some of the most strident coming from the movement known as Radical Orthodoxy. The focus here is on two of the movement's most political voices: John Milbank and William Cavanaugh. As a work of critical reception of their political theologies, the primary goal here is to place their political theologies of state and church in an historical and theological context and provide an assessment of their theological soundness. A secondary goal is to develop a new way of assessing their work using a doctrinal framework derived from an understanding of God's work as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. Using this approach highlights why Milbank and Cavanaugh hold to a high political ecclesiology and a low, or 'profane', view of the state. One of the implications of their political theologies is a diminished respect for engagement with the state as a legitimate politics for the church to engage in. The logic at work here is that the theological assessment of the state correlates directly to one's evaluation of the church's practice of engaging with the state. In arguing against a judgment of the state as either sacred or profane, which is the position of Milbank and Cavanaugh, the position here follows this same logic, and argues that if the state can be properly understood as mundane, then this judgment permits a considered engagement of the church with the state.

The next two sections of this chapter offer brief overall introductions to John Milbank and William Cavanaugh. Following those are definitional and methodological sections. First, the key terms of ‘politics’ and ‘state’ are defined as they are used throughout and distinguished from one another, as they must be in order to make sense of Milbank and Cavanaugh. The methodological framework is then outlined. In order to assess the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh, a doctrinal framework has been developed that uses creation, preservation, and redemption as touchstones for relating the state to the work of God. Intersecting this framework is a scale of value from sacred to profane. Throughout Scripture plays an important part in discerning the shape of these doctrines and in offering reflection on the state and civil authorities from a biblical perspective.

Introducing John Milbank

Anglo-Catholic John Milbank is one of the most prominent Anglophone theologians working today. His corpus covers many topics, but have as their primary overarching agenda the recovery of theology as the queen of the sciences. His Radical Orthodoxy project is neither reformist nor apologetic (there being no one for theology to apologize to), but, rather, an assertive movement for the recovery of true theology, including political theology.

Milbank did his doctoral studies on Giambattista Vico at the University of Birmingham under Leon Pompa.¹ His early work was nurtured by adherents to English Christian Socialism. The history of the Christendom Trust records that ‘Mr John Milbank was appointed as Reckitt Fellow, to start work in October 1984.’² Milbank was also active in Kenneth Leech’s Jubilee Group.³ At the time, these groups were engaged with Thatcherism and were active in publishing on the church’s response to the New Right. As a Christian socialist, Milbank was hardly impressed with the rise of the New Right and what it did to undermine many institutions of society, such as trade unions. Milbank’s most famous work, *Theology and Social Theory*,

1. John Milbank, “The Priority of the Made: Giambattista Vico and the Analogy of Creation” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1986). This was published as John Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668–1744: Part 1: The Early Metaphysics*, Studies in the History of Philosophy (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991); *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668–1744: Part 2: Language, Law and History*, Studies in the History of Philosophy (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992).

2. See Martin Jarrett-Kerr, “Twenty Years of the Christendom Trust: An historical account, guide and commentary by a founder member,” <<http://www.mbreckitttrust.org/jarrettkerr.html>> (accessed April 23, 2013). The Trust is now known as the ‘MB Reckitt Trust’ after its founder Maurice Reckitt, an Anglo-Catholic Christian Socialist.

3. See Michael Johnston, “Where Two or Three are Gathered: A Christian Socialist Family Tree,” <<http://web.archive.org/web/20110611134534/http://www.anglocatholicsocialism.org/familytree.html>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

dedicated in part to the Christendom Trust, was written as a response to Thatcherism and its economic and political rationalism.⁴

Milbank's was an unusual response to Thatcher, with a philosophical depth lacking in others, and with no reference to Thatcher herself.⁵ More common Christian responses favoured statecraft and 'prophetic' critique, which generally assumed the validity of the market/state nexus for addressing questions of policy delivery, leaving unquestioned the ontology of the state and its inherent nature. While leftist liberals detected a bald-faced lie in the Thatcherite axiom that 'there is no alternative,' Milbank believed that this was honest, since it is the essential nature of the modern state to move in this direction. But Milbank does not believe that any alternative to neo-liberal politics can be found in the Labour Party or the secular Left – it can only be found in Christian socialism.

It is important to understand what kind of socialist Milbank is. He is certainly not a Fabian socialist (known for its state socialism and heavy involvement in Labour party politics), and many of Milbank's favoured Christian socialists were not fans of the Fabians either. Milbank rejects state socialism and instead wishes to find something useful in other socialist and political traditions, especially English Christian socialists:

we need to take the risk of thinking in an altogether new way that will take up the traditions of socialism less wedded to progress, historical inevitability, materialism, and the state, and put them into debate with conservative anti-capitalist thematics and the traditions of classical and biblical political thought which may allow us to see the inherent restrictions of the parameters of modern social, political, and economic reflection.⁶

It is a purpose of this thesis to examine whether Milbank's desire to think such new thoughts is successful, or whether he merely restates forgotten voices from the Christian socialist tradition, especially from English pluralist and distributist traditions.

Another purpose of this thesis is to piece together Milbank's writing about the state and how he understands Christian politics in relation to the state. This is necessary because, while Milbank often mentions the state, he does not directly address it in detail or systematically, but underlying much of his writing on political matters there is an implicit theology of the state as part of the secular. Among his concerns is the coercive, violent, and disciplinary state, and its eventual overcoming in peaceful

4. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), v, xi. All references to this work are to the second edition unless otherwise specified.

5. Elsewhere Milbank is more explicit about the negative influence of Thatcher. See John Milbank, "Religion, Culture, and Anarchy: The Attack on the Arnoldian Vision," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 26.

6. John Milbank, "Liberalism versus Liberalism," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 242.

Christian socialism. At the root of this are several related topics – the ontology of violence, state sovereignty as an outcome of this, and Christian socialism as its remedy.

Milbank has a two-fold task in his ‘political’ theology. Milbank seeks first to diagnose the malaise and illness that vex modern life: ‘My desire is merely to undermine not only the sacral aura, but also its long-extended shadow – the secular legitimacy – of coercive power. And to insist that salvation is precisely, *out of* this political domain which constantly reproduces “original” sin.’⁷ He then attempts to provide a cure for the ills of modernity in Christian socialism, built in a recovered theological tradition: ‘I stand on the whole within that tradition of non-statist Christian Socialism which regards modern statism as involving the support of the very rich, a guarantee of their finances, and an enabling additional support through “welfare” of their dispossessed workforce.’⁸

Milbank’s aim – to dissolve formal distinctions between Athens and Jerusalem and develop a synthesis of the two – is not only testified to in Radical Orthodoxy’s strong interest in philosophy, but also opens space for interested philosophers for dialogue. Milbank’s work has also come to the attention of contemporary philosophers, most notably Slavoj Žižek.⁹ John D. Caputo is another philosopher, albeit with strong theological inclinations, who has been in dialogue with Milbank.¹⁰ Charles Taylor warms to Radical Orthodoxy in his *A Secular Age*.¹¹ Milbank has also come to the notice of anthropologists and political theorists, which signals their awareness of the re-emergence of theology as being an increasing unavoidable dialogue partner in their own disciplines.¹²

Milbank’s works have received an unparalleled critical response in contemporary theology. Several volumes have been devoted to responding to Radical Orthodoxy and several journals have devoted special issues to his theology.¹³ Besides these vol-

7. John Milbank, “An Essay against Secular Order,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15, no. 2 (1987): 220.

8. John Milbank, “Preface,” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), xvi–xvii.

9. Witness their collaboration and debates in these texts: John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis with Catherine Pickstock, *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010); Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Ed. Creston Davis, *Short Circuits* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

10. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

11. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 295, 774, 851. Milbank notes Taylor’s observation of his work with appreciation: John Milbank, “The grandeur of reason and the perversity of rationalism: Radical Orthodoxy’s first decade,” in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 383–384.

12. On anthropology see Joel Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285–294; and Fenella Cannell, “Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

13. The key volumes are: Laurence Paul Hemming, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005);

umes, numerous other critical and supportive works have been published, showing that Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy cannot be ignored. Radical Orthodoxy is an influential theological movement in and of itself, and has had an impressive impact on many other theologians and theological sub-disciplines, which is not surprising given its agenda to encompass the totality of human thought. Furthermore, Milbank has had direct and formational influence on his students, notably Catherine Pickstock and Phillip Blond, with substantial influence on other older scholars, such as Stanley Hauerwas, all of whom have advanced the Radical Orthodoxy agenda.¹⁴

Milbank is a contentious theologian. Much of the critical literature is in the form of ‘Yes, but . . .’ format. An example of this is Duncan Forrester’s assessment that Radical Orthodoxy was ‘sending shock waves of excitement throughout the Anglo-American theological scene’, while not offering much in terms of ‘social, political and economic radicalism’ flowing from their orthodoxy.¹⁵ Less appreciative is Ronald Preston’s assessment: ‘I think Milbank’s position is very dangerous as the basis of a Christian social theology.’¹⁶ Milbank’s international reception has generally been mixed. He is hardly known in Germany, while *Theology and Social Theory* was only published in French in 2010.¹⁷

Many scholars, in reviewing Milbank’s works, have been critical of his readings and use of his sources. Is Milbank’s comprehension of Durkheim ‘flatly mistaken’ and ‘hysterical’ and expounded ‘without proof’, as Ivan Strenski thinks it is?¹⁸ David Bentley Hart finds Milbank’s deployment of Heidegger ‘idiosyncratic and inspissated’, yet valuable, once altered.¹⁹ Both Clayton Crockett and David Toole

Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, eds., *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau, eds., *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy”* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, eds., *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Chris K. Huebner and Tripp York, eds., *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*, with a foreword by John Milbank (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010). The journal issues are: *New Blackfriars* (June 1992), *Modern Theology* (October 1992), *Arachne* 2:1 (1995), *Philosophy and Theology* 16:1 (2004) and 9:3/4 (1996), *Journal of Religious Ethics* (Summer 2004), *The Conrad Grebel Review* (Spring 2005).

14. On the influence of Hauerwas on Radical Orthodoxy see Christopher McMahon, “Theology and the Redemptive Mission of the Church: A Catholic Response to Milbank’s Challenge,” *The Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 5 (September 2010): 781, 782, 792.

15. Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 162.

16. Ronald H. Preston, “A Theological Response to Sociology,” in *Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum*, ed. Leslie J. Francis (London: Cassell, 1999), 56.

17. John Milbank, *Théologie et théorie sociale: Au-delà de la raison séculière*, trans. Pascale Robin (Paris: Cerf, 2010). Works introducing Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy to French readers include Denis Sureau, *Pour une Nouvelle Théologie Politique* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2008) and Adrian Pabst and Olivier-Thomas Venard, *Radical Orthodoxy: Pour une révolution théologique*, with a foreword by Grégory Solari (Genève: Ad Solem, 2004).

18. Ivan Strenski, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 183–185.

19. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 42.

claim Milbank misreads Deleuze.²⁰ Jeffrey Stout has questions about Milbank's reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and joins David M. Craig in being very critical of Milbank's reading of John Ruskin.²¹ Gavin Hyman thinks Milbank oversimplifies Nietzsche.²² Romand Coles also has misgivings about Milbank's take on Nietzsche and Derrida.²³ Nicholas Lash argues that Milbank mishandles Karl Rahner and Gutiérrez.²⁴ Numerous people have found Milbank's reading of Aquinas to be idiosyncratic.²⁵ Daniel Franklin Pilario also thinks that Milbank misinterprets Hans Blumenberg.²⁶ Joseph W. H. Lough thinks 'Marxian social theory' is misunderstood by Milbank.²⁷ Milbank and his critics will get further attention in later chapters, we now turn William Cavanaugh.

Introducing William Cavanaugh

William Cavanaugh is an American Catholic theologian who earned a PhD from Duke University under Stanley Hauerwas. His doctoral work was a study of the church's politics in Chile under the Pinochet regime, published as *Torture and Eucharist*.²⁸ Cavanaugh continues to have a close relationship with Hauerwas, being one of several of Hauerwas's former students devoting attention to filling out and extending Hauerwas' ideas in complementary work. Cavanaugh's work makes concrete some of the speculations of his mentor about the relationship between the church as the Body of Christ and politics, with many of the themes found in Cavanaugh already present in Hauerwas's essay, "What Could It Mean for the Church to Be Christ's Body?"²⁹ Furthermore, Cavanaugh and Hauerwas each contributed to the Blackwell

20. Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001), 33; David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*, Radical Traditions (London: SCM Press, 2001), 77–79.

21. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 105–106; David M. Craig, "Naves and Nukes: John Ruskin as 'Augustinian' Social Theorist?" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2004): 325–356.

22. Gavin Hyman, "John Milbank and Nihilism: A Metaphysical (Mis)Reading?" *Literature and Theology* 14, no. 4 (December 2000): 107–111.

23. Romand Coles, "Storied Others and the Possibilities of Caritas: Milbank and Neo-Nietzschean Ethics," *Modern Theology* 8, no. 4 (1992): 331–351.

24. Nicholas Lash, "Not Exactly Politics of Power?" *Modern Theology* 8, no. 4 (1992): 353–364.

25. See John Marenbon, "Aquinas, Radical Orthodoxy and the Importance of Truth," in *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth*, ed. Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 49–63; Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 397–414. Ivana Noble, *Theological Interpretation of Culture in Post-Communist Context: Central and East European Search for Roots* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 58.

26. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis*, 473, 480–483.

27. See Joseph W. H. Lough, *Weber and the Persistence of Religion: Social Theory, Capitalism and the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2004), 104.

28. William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist in Pinochet's Chile*, PhD, Duke University, 1996.

29. Stanley Hauerwas, "What Could It Mean for the Church to Be Christ's Body? A Question without a Clear Answer," in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 19–31.

Companion that the other one edited.³⁰ Like Cavanaugh, Hauerwas is no fan of the state and has scattered throughout his works negative comments about the state such as this, 'the idolatry most convenient to us all remains the presumed primacy of the nation-state.'³¹ He, like Cavanaugh, describes his politics as 'anarchistic,' and challenges the mainstream definition of 'politics.'³² In more recent works, Hauerwas has cited at length, and with approval, Cavanaugh's view of the state,³³ although Hauerwas seems to allow more space for the positive rôle of the state than does Cavanaugh.³⁴ Yet they find common ground in locating, inside the church, the true politics (as opposed to the parody of politics found in the state) and practices that are learned by following the example of others.³⁵ But their emphasis is slightly different and complementary, with Hauerwas focusing on ecclesial ethics and Cavanaugh having an ecclesial politics, as a subset of this.

Cavanaugh contributed the primary 'political' contribution to manifesto *Radical Orthodoxy*, in which he names his basic political orientation as anarchist.³⁶ To the uninitiated, Cavanaugh's 'Christian anarchism' is an oxymoron, or at least puzzling. Yet, in claiming it for his political theological project, Cavanaugh places himself in a minority Christian tradition that is opposed to the state and its claims of legitimacy. 'By it,' Cavanaugh writes, 'I do not mean no government, but rather no state.'³⁷ Specifically, his 'anarchism' is to be taken in its literal meaning, and 'not in the sense that it proposes chaos, but in that it challenges the false order of the state.'³⁸

Cavanaugh's Christian anarchism rejects the state, and advances the notion of the church as a body of Christ as a political body, which embodies true politics in its own right. As Cavanaugh describes it, the church's 'true politics' takes places in the 'true' church, which is also the true bearer of meaning in history. This is a sacramental

30. William T. Cavanaugh, "Discerning: Politics and Reconciliation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 196–208; Stanley Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 136–149.

31. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story," in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 110.

32. Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 10.

33. See, for instance, Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 62–63, 65.

34. Hauerwas: 'Yet I have not denied the place of the state—even the coercive state—as part of God's "order." Rather, what I have refused in the name of an autonomous created order is to legitimate the state as an end in and of itself.' Stanley Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 107.

35. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002); Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of the Church: How We Lay Bricks and Make Disciples," in *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 93–111.

36. William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (London: Blackwell, 1999), 182.

37. *Ibid.*, 182.

38. *Ibid.*, 194.

political ecclesiology, which sees the Eucharist as the pivotal Christian practice and the centre of the church's true politics of reconciliation. For Cavanaugh, this notion of the church must be rediscovered, since in modernity we saw the fall of the church. By 'church', Cavanaugh has a notion of the church in an ideal form as the *ekklesia*, which may or may not bear resemblances to actual churches.

A key theme in Cavanaugh is that both church and state have developed their own answers to the problem of reunifying humanity from its present fragmentation. For the state, this is part of its origins. Offering a revisionist history of the state, Cavanaugh sees the state develop through war and the privatization of faith. The state's will for birth and growth suppresses the church and sets up the opposition between church and state that typifies his theology. Given his genetic account of the state, Cavanaugh's state becomes, in his theology, the Antichrist – something of profane origins and in competition with the body of Christ. This is upheld in Cavanaugh's theology by his selective use of secular political theory.

By taking Cavanaugh's sacramental political ecclesiology and warring state together, we can understand Cavanaugh working largely through the perspective provided by the following two antimetaboles. Firstly, with respect to the profane state: 'War made the state, and the state made war.'³⁹ Secondly, regarding the church, is the view associated with Henri de Lubac that, as the Eucharist makes the church, the church makes the Eucharist.⁴⁰ What connects these two statements are the contrasts within them. War and the state are based in violence and division, while the church and Eucharist are unifying. They also mirror each other in that a ritual (war or Eucharist) forms a political body (state or church), so the church is political through the Eucharist, making a social body that rivals the state.

Cavanaugh builds a political theology from the negation of the legitimacy of the state, leaving the church as the only 'true' political body. In making the case that the state is profane, he offers a compelling and seductive case that the state is good for nothing (or very little) and is, rather, the embodiment of evil in the modern world. While this has been done before within the Christian tradition, other Christian anarchists have used Scripture to argue their case. Cavanaugh is unique in that he primarily offers historical and theoretical reasons as the basis of his critique of the

39. Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

40. A clear statement of this does not appear in de Lubac, see Rustin E. Brian, "Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages – By Henri Cardinal de Lubac," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 4 (October 2010): 496. Cavanaugh cites Raniero Cantalamessa as saying: 'the Eucharist makes the Church by making the Church Eucharist!' William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 232. In his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* Pope John Paul II this idea is rendered, 'the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist' Pope John Paul II, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," Vatican, April 17, 2003, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html> (accessed April 23, 2013), §26.

state, and sacraments as the way forward into the true politics grounded solely in the church.

Amongst theologians, Cavanaugh's published work has had a mixed reception. In some quarters his ideas have received widespread acceptance and endorsement, while at the same time several critics have taken issue with the conclusions he makes. Criticisms have typically been at specific points of doctrinal departure, without an overall assessment of Cavanaugh's work.⁴¹ One critic, Mary Doak, finds that the 'anarchic oppositionalism' of William Cavanaugh and Daniel Bell depends on an unrealistic view of human nature, and that the church, as a *polis*, is not perfect.⁴² Randall S. Rosenberg writes that Cavanaugh is too negative about ethical possibilities of modernity, and that, by using Charles Taylor's notion of a 'Ricci reading of modernity', we can develop a more nuanced understanding of what is beneficial in modern culture.⁴³ Christopher J. Insole has also made a study of Cavanaugh,⁴⁴ with his most penetrating critique being the suggestion that Cavanaugh needs the absolutist state (that Insole claims he builds up through the selective use of a dubious range of sources) to advocate for the opposite in the church. Charles T. Mathewes, in positively reviewing *Torture and Eucharist*, remarks that Cavanaugh had an easy target in Pinochet's Chile, with torture not being what threatens Americans.⁴⁵ Keith Watkins welcomes Cavanaugh's work, but he questions how, in Cavanaugh's terms, Christians can ever participate in the state. He also questions whether Protestants can make sense of Cavanaugh's heavily Eucharistic ecclesiology.⁴⁶ Jonathan Chaplin gives two cheers for Cavanaugh's critique of modern politics, withholding one for Cavanaugh's poor treatment of two issues. First, in his treatment of the contractarian tradition, he conflates the libertarian Locke with the more absolutist Thomas Hobbes and Rousseau.⁴⁷ Second, Chaplin takes Cavanaugh to task over his account of the

41. A short overarching critique can be found in Matthew A. Shadle, "Cavanaugh on the Church and the Modern State: An Appraisal," *Horizons* 37, no. 2 (2010): 246–270.

42. Mary Doak, "The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Critique," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2007): 384; also *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

43. Randall S. Rosenberg, "The Catholic Imagination and Modernity: William Cavanaugh's Theopolitical Imagination and Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imagination," *The Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 6 (2007): 911–931.

44. Christopher J. Insole, "Discerning the Theopolitical: A Response to Cavanaugh's Reimagining of Political Space," *Political Theology* 7, no. 3 (2006): 323–335.

45. Charles T. Mathewes, "Book Review: *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 3 (2000): 401. Yet Cavanaugh has shown how torture shapes the American political imagination in "Telling the Truth about Ourselves: Torture and Eucharist in the U.S. Popular Imagination," *The Other Journal*, May 8, 2009, <<http://theotherjournal.com/2009/05/08/telling-the-truth-about-ourselves-torture-and-eucharist-in-the-u-s-popular-imaginat/>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

46. Keith Watkins, "The Church as Contrast Society: A Review Essay," *Encounter* 67, no. 1 (2006): 87–99.

47. Jonathan Chaplin, "Suspended Communities or Covenanted Communities?: Reformed Reflections on the Social Thought of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 162–163.

centralized state.⁴⁸ In the following assessment of Cavanaugh, these critics will be drawn on where useful.

While Cavanaugh has clearly studied and utilized political theory, political theory has not returned the favour to the same extent, although reviews of his book *Myth of Religious Violence* show that the implications of his work are starting to be noted in political science and international relations.⁴⁹ Some attention has been given to him in other disciplines. In religious studies, Stout tackles Cavanaugh's central thesis in *Democracy and Tradition*.⁵⁰ Cavanaugh is also starting to be noticed among international relations scholars who study the rôle of religion between states.⁵¹ In social anthropology, the work of theologians has been examined for their claims about the fundamental ontologies of violence and society. Milbank and Cavanaugh are, for example, both discussed in a recent article by Joel Robbins.⁵²

In the following chapters, Cavanaugh will be criticized from the perspectives outlined later in this introduction.

Understanding 'Politics' and the 'State'

In discussing the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh, the emphasis will fall on how they view 'politics' and the 'state'. Distinguishing between these terms is important for two reasons. First, politics and the state developed separately. Second, it is possible to have a high view of politics and a low view of the state. This is seen in the work of many political theologians, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, who are trying to develop a non-statist political theology. This distinction will be important in the next chapter, which will consider the politicization of theology. It is imperative that these contested terms are clearly defined before proceeding to further discussion.

Politics

When defining 'politics', one comes up against the many uses the term has.⁵³ A common feature of contemporary definitions is that 'politics' is often understood to be that which pertains to the state. D. D. Raphael, for instance, writes that 'the political

48. Chaplin, "Suspended Communities or Covenanted Communities?," 164–166.

49. See A. Alexander Stummvoll, "Demythologising Religious Violence," *European Political Science* 9, no. 4 (December 2010): 515–523 and Scott M. Thomas, "The myth of religious violence: secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict," *International Affairs* 86, no. 3 (May 2010): 774–776.

50. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 101.

51. See Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

52. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology."

53. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures: "Science as a Vocation", "Politics as a Vocation"*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 32.

is whatever concerns the State'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Jacques Ellul, the French Reformed lay theologian defines politics as follows: 'political matter [sic] ("*le politique*") is the domain and sphere of public interests created and represented by the state. Politics ("*la politique*") is action relative to this domain, the conduct of political groups, and any influence exercised on that conduct.'⁵⁵ Such views have been described as 'politics as statecraft'.⁵⁶

That politics is defined as statecraft is a symptom of a limited, perhaps 'statist' (see definition on page 16), political imagination. In order to understand the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh, the definition of 'politics' must be distinguished from the concept of 'state'. 'Politics' is understood here in a broader way than just the state; it takes place in families, churches, unions, and other organs of society that remain outside the state. Some writers have acknowledged that politics includes these things, but have included them as part of the state. An example is the Marxist Nicos Poulantzas, who makes everything political part of the state:

the system of the State is composed of several apparatuses or institutions of which certain have a principally repressive role, in the strong sense, and others a principally ideological role. The former constitute the repressive apparatus of the State, that is to say the State apparatus in the classical Marxist sense of the term (government, army, police, tribunals and administration). The latter constitute the ideological apparatuses of the State, such as the Church, the political parties, the unions (with the exception of course, of the revolutionary party or trade union organizations), the schools, the mass media (newspapers, radio, television), and, from a certain point of view, the family.⁵⁷

Poulantzas's solution to the problem of the definition of 'state' does not permit a definition of politics outside the state, nor does it permit an understanding of the state as independent of other associations. In the following discussion, on the other hand, and in broad agreement with Milbank and Cavanaugh, 'politics' is defined in such a way as to preserve its application to non-statist societies, referring here to the regulation and governance of human societies (including the family, associations, churches and nations) in order to preserve them so that it can achieve certain goals.⁵⁸

54. D. D. Raphael, *Problems of Political Philosophy*, Revised (London: Macmillan, 1976), 27.

55. Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, 1st American, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 3n1. Ellul's italics. Also see 15n6 where Ellul's approves of Weber's limited definition of politics as 'the leadership, or the exercise of influence on the leadership, of a *political* organization, in other words a *state*.' This can be found in Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 32.

56. Daniel M. Bell Jr., "State and Civil Society," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 423. Another critic of this view is Tony Skillen, "The Statist Conception of Politics," *Radical Philosophy* 2 (Summer 1972): 2.

57. Nicos Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," *New Left Review* 58, no. 1 (1969): 77.

58. This definition roughly follows Graeme C. Moodie, "Politics is about government," in *What is Politics?: The Activity and Its Study*, ed. Adrian Leftwich (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 19–32.

It is important to note here that ‘governance’ is distinguished from the ‘Government’, which is often used as a synonym for the state in contemporary English.⁵⁹ But in its general sense, ‘politics as governance’ is a universal human phenomenon, and exists in all societies that make collective decisions and carry them out, even if they do not have something identifiable as a state. Applying this definition of ‘politics’ to ‘political theology’ would make this term mean theological reflection on the nature of politics and how God relates to human societies, including the society of the church.

This definition of ‘politics’ is in agreement with Milbank and Cavanaugh, in defining it without reference to the state. The title of the present work refers to the political church of Milbank and Cavanaugh. What do they mean by ‘political’, when they say that the church is political? Milbank is highly critical of modern politics, which, reflecting his anti-voluntarism, he sees defined ‘as a field of pure power’⁶⁰, or ‘concerned with creation, or the institution of a new, secular space.’⁶¹ But, as a constructive political theologian, one might expect a clearer definition from him. An explicit statement of what Milbank means by ‘politics’ remains elusive, but we can get an idea of his meaning of ‘politics’ from other indirect statements. For example, in an essay on Matthew Arnold, Milbank suggests that the early Church promoted ‘a new community of primal allegiance and primary nurture—the Church—outside the political state.’⁶² The Church is a ‘universal society’ distinct from the *polis*.⁶³ In fact, Milbank thinks that Paul, ‘in speaking of *ecclesia*, proposes a new sort of *polis* which can counteract and even eventually subsume the Roman empire.’⁶⁴ In this way, Milbank makes the church the true *polis*.

Cavanaugh defines the ‘political’ in his introduction to *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*: ‘The political is broadly understood as the use of structural power to organize a society or community of people.’⁶⁵ Because Cavanaugh believes that the church is a community of people, the church has its own politics outside the state. Indeed, for Cavanaugh, the church is the ‘true’ politics.⁶⁶ As seen in Chapter 3, Cavanaugh shows how both church and state offer different solutions to the political problem of disunity. This discussion highlights how Cavanaugh sees the politics of the state and the politics of church as different and in competition.

59. Christopher W. Morris, *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20–22.

60. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 10.

61. *Ibid.*, 26.

62. Milbank, “Religion, Culture, and Anarchy,” 33.

63. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 99.

64. Milbank, “Liberalism versus Liberalism,” 253.

65. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, “Introduction,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 2–4.

66. Cavanaugh, “The City,” 185–186.

The 'State'

Since this discussion is also focussed on Milbank's and Cavanaugh's views about the state, it is essential to define this term. The remainder of this section will examine how Milbank and Cavanaugh view the modern state, and propose a working definition for this work. One important parameter for this discussion is that, since Milbank and Cavanaugh work and mostly write about the USA and Britain, there is a North Atlantic focus, limited to Western Europe and North America.

The modern state can be claimed to be something different from the civil authorities that preceded it. Accepting this discontinuity would make it difficult to apply the terminology and political theories across the obscure barrier between pre-modern civil authorities and modern states. Furthermore, it would make it difficult to apply pre-modern theological reflections (from Scripture, the Church Fathers, and mediaeval theologians) on civil authorities to modern politics. A solution to this problem is to locate, instead, *continuity* between the earliest civil authorities and our contemporary ones. This would rely on what these political structures have in common. Here, the common ground is taken as the functions of the state to administer justice, preserve civil order, and provide for some goods in common (such as education, economic administration, and infrastructure) within a defined territory.⁶⁷ Locating common tasks of the state across time should not be taken as an attempt to disguise the differences between the civil authorities of antiquity and those of today. But using the word 'state' as a form of shorthand for what these civil authorities have in common can provide a way of talking about what is shared across time from antiquity onward.⁶⁸

Milbank and Cavanaugh are primarily concerned with the modern state, and, as Chapter 3 shows, they advocate a type of discontinuity between pre-modern political authorities and the modern state. Their description and evaluation of the modern state relies heavily on Max Weber. Weber, as is commonly claimed, proposed a definition of the state in this sentence:

Nowadays, in contrast, we must say that the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory—and this idea of "territory" is an essential defining feature.⁶⁹

However, this definition is controversial because some consider it inadequate as a 'definition', while others, who accept that it is a definition, find it deficient. Rather than recognize Weber's definition as a definition, Christopher W. Morris calls it a

67. This solution is also favoured by Alexander Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Notion of the State: An Introduction to Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 28–35.

68. *Ibid.*, 34.

69. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 33.

'Weberian attribute' rather than as a complete definition in itself.⁷⁰ But Weber's attribute or definition is really made up of several components: legitimacy, violence, monopolised force, and territory.⁷¹

A problem with Weber's definition is that it is typified by the state's *means*, which have come to be understood as primarily violent or forceful. Even though this attribute of force accurately applies to the modern state, to focus one's attention on a single attribute among many, is to reduce the state to one characteristic, giving it a one dimensional character.⁷² A shortcoming of Weber's focus on the means of the state is that it provides for no comprehension of the ends of the state. Weber ruled out defining the state by its ends, since 'there is no conceivable end which *some* political association has not at some time pursued.'⁷³ Nor does he accept defining the state by its 'activities', since, 'There is almost no task that a political organization has not undertaken at one time or another.'⁷⁴ By locating the means specific to the state, Weber thought he had found what was unique about the modern state. But the definition merely shifts the identification of the state to what is legitimate.⁷⁵ How does the violence of the state become legitimate? In the history of reflection on the political authorities, legitimacy is rarely derived solely from the means of the state; also brought into play are the state's origins, tasks and ends.

Despite the shortcoming of Weber's 'definition', it remains important for the reason that it has been adopted by many modern political theologians as the basis for their denunciation of the state. Milbank and Cavanaugh are among them.⁷⁶ This is often because, as will be shown later, violence is seen to be both the means of the state (as it is for Weber) and the foundation of the state.⁷⁷

Weber's definition of the state, as already shown, is limited to the means of the state. This raises a couple of important questions. Firstly, by focusing on what the state *does*, attention is diverted away from what the state *is*. This ontological question, of what the state *is*, will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Second, Weber's attention to the means of the state makes his definition a descriptive definition, being a definition aimed at describing something as it appears. Such definitions can claim

70. Morris, *An Essay on the Modern State*, 295.

71. This observation comes from John Hoffman, "Sovereignty," in *The Impact of Feminism on Political Concepts and Debates*, ed. Georgina Blakeley and Valerie Bryson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 44–45.

72. Adopting Weber's definition risks reducing the concerns of the state to violence, making any positive evaluation of the state difficult to comprehend by those opposed to violence. See, for instance, Johanna Kantola, "Book Reviews: John Hoffman. *Sovereignty*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998, ISBN 0-335-19789-2." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, no. 1 (2001): 150–151.

73. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al., vol. 1 (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 55.

74. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 33.

75. See Stuart Hall, "The state in question," in *The Idea of the Modern State* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984), 16–17.

76. See, for instance, Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 5.

77. Making such a link being provenance and essence is rejected in Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 140–141.

objectivity, although choosing one definition over another is rarely without some bias. By contrast, a normative definition is more inclined to contain value judgments. With respect to the state, this would include a focus on the ends and tasks of the state, rather than just its means.

In the history of Christian political thought it has been more common to define or to identify the state normatively through the ends and tasks of the state. Representative of this approach is Calvin's statement of the purpose of government:

Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity.⁷⁸

Some might object that such normative statements about the tasks of the state are not strictly definitions because they do not offer a clear statement of what the word 'state' means. Nevertheless, these normative definitions have been useful, not only in judging the validity of the tasks and ends adopted by states, but also in assessing the means that they use.

For the purposes of this work, the state is defined as follows:

The state is a set of institutions under the control of a legitimate government, and which are endowed by law with force and other means in order to administer justice and provide for social order and common goods for the people within a defined territory.⁷⁹

This definition aims to combine the means and tasks of the state, while providing for a notion of legitimacy. This is normative in so far as the following discussion aims to have a mundane understanding of the state (this is discussed below on page 16). This is obviously a more positive definition of the state than Weber's is held to be by Milbank and Cavanaugh. Where the word 'state' appears in the text of the present work, the context should make clear what is meant by state at each point.

Statism, Anti-Statism, and the Political Imagination

The Western world has changed dramatically since the nineteenth century, not least in its political make-up. The rise and fall of European territories and empires can

78. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press, 1961), §XX.2.

79. This formulation draws on the definitions of R. M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (Oxford University Press: London, 1964), 22, and David Copp, "The Idea of a Legitimate State," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 28, no. 1 (1999): 7.

be easily seen by comparing political maps from 1800 to 2000. The changes are not merely the formation of new boundaries between sovereign states, but also the strengthening of these boundaries and the concentration of state sovereignty within their territories. These political and material changes of recent centuries have been reflected in changes in how citizens see themselves in relationship to states. The rise of the modern state saw its increased control over individual lives and its intrusion into new areas of community life. There are physical realities here, but the rise of the state also transformed the political imagination, altering how we think of our societies and how they are governed. The effects of these changes are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Introduced here are two forms of political imagination that have grown alongside the rise of the modern state, namely *statism* and *anti-statism*.

What is meant by ‘political imagination’ here? This phrase (or ‘political imaginary’⁸⁰) does not mean that politics is a realm of make-believe. Rather, the term describes how people think about the nature and task of political societies, how politics are imagined to operate, and how it is thought society is best ordered and improved. A range of political imaginaries exist, some will be conservative, believing that the *staus quo* is preferable, others will imagine new political futures. The concept implies that we need not accept the so-called givens of contemporary political discourse and suggests that we can re-imagine our political problems, associations, sources, and other things in order to make things anew. There are other ways politics can be developed and enacted, but they needed to be imagined before they can be realized. For example, a non-statist politics needs to imagine that social order and social change can be achieved without the state’s involvement. Even the current dominance of the state once existed more in the imagination than in reality, as Cavanaugh suggests: ‘Modern politics was not discovered but imagined, invented.’⁸¹

Statism⁸² is a political imaginary held by those who imagine that a more just, peaceful, free, and prosperous society can only be brought about by giving the state greatly increased powers over a nation’s social, economic, and political life. Such a position grants the autonomous modern state powers to intrude into the lives of individuals, families, trade unions, churches, businesses, and other human institutions. In practice, statist not only cannot imagine society being ordered without the state, they see the state as the sole practical means by which society can be managed and improved. In its strongest form, statism requires a belief that there are *no* limits to the good the state can bring. But to try to implement total state control of society results in totalitarianism, such as seen in Nazi Germany or in the Soviet Union.

However, not everyone who grants a rôle to the state in the provision of justice and order is by definition a statist. One can uphold a positive rôle for the state without

80. ‘Imaginary’ here follows the usage of Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

81. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 2.

82. Some use *étatisme* from the French *état*. For example, see Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, 5, 44.

slipping into statism. The line between legitimate state action and statism is crossed where the sovereignty of other institutions of social and economic life are transgressed by the state in an assertive expansion of the scope of its own sovereignty. So statism can be avoided where the sovereignty of the state is limited and where the sovereignty of other human institutions can still be asserted.

Where the statist imaginary is prevalent the state becomes difficult to question since it becomes a presupposition of political discourse.⁸³ Under such circumstances, which political philosopher Jens Bartelson believes exist in the West today, 'we simply seem to lack the intellectual resources necessary to conceive of a political order beyond or without the state, since the state has been present for long enough for the concept to confine our political imaginations.'⁸⁴ That statism is prevalent has become a puzzle, even if few recognize it as such:

The significant question is: Why do a large number of people come to believe that only through increased state intervention can justice be achieved? To a great extent this belief is due to the overwhelming acceptance of the state as the source of value and law. Society not only looks for solutions within the paradigm defined by the state, but also finds it difficult to consider the view that statism is at the heart of the problem.⁸⁵

In addition to the answer provided in this quote, it might also be that statism, as Bartelson suggests, has colonized people's political imaginations. Further answers will be discussed in the next chapter, but the question is one that Milbank and Cavanaugh would also consider important in considering the rôle of the state in society.

Milbank and Cavanaugh both oppose statism, and for this reason they can be described as anti-statists. Anti-statism comes in several degrees, with the most extreme anti-statists being those anarchists who oppose all states; the less extreme being classical liberals who believe in a minimal state.⁸⁶ If statists place all their hopes for social improvement in the state, anarchists believe that any faith in the state is misplaced. Therefore, anti-statism, or anarchism, which finds no value in the state, is the opposite of statism, which finds all value in the state. But this is a special type of opposition. Paul Thomas holds that Marx was opposed to both 'the *étatist* and the anarchist' believing that they 'have in common a certain specific form of false

83. Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

84. Ibid., 1–2. Here Bartelson is commenting on Hedley Bull's notion that the 'vitality of the states system' depends in part on the 'tyranny of the concepts and normative principles associated with it'. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1977). Also see Crispin Sartwell, *Against the State: An Introduction to Anarchist Political Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 38.

85. William Marina, "Egalitarianism and Empire," in *The Politicization of Society*, ed. Kenneth S. Templeton Jr. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), 141.

86. For a graphic depiction of this scale of statism see Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 17.

consciousness' or even 'a type of idolatry.'⁸⁷ While the statist (such as Bruno Bauer) is too sanguine about the state, the anarchist (such as Proudhon) is too hostile.⁸⁸

What the statist and the anti-statist share is the perspective that one's evaluation of the state will correspond with how one relates to it. To clarify this point, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7:23 is helpful:

"Do not become slaves of human masters!" This would happen in two different ways. First, it may take place through a rebellion against and overthrow of the established order. Second, it may come about by investing the current order with a religious significance.⁸⁹

Bonhoeffer published these words in 1937 during his conflict with the German Reich Church. In this passage, consonant with the overall thrust of his work, he is concerned that the totalitarian Nazi government not be justified on the basis of theology (especially as an order of creation, a point discussed further in Chapter 3), but neither should Christians be overly hostile to government. Bonhoeffer follows the above quotation with an exhortation to obedience to the authorities. In his reading of Romans 13 that forms a part of this discussion, Bonhoeffer finds St Paul saying that it is irrelevant to 'justify or condemn an authority of this world'.⁹⁰

In general, Bonhoeffer identifies two related approaches by which one is bound or enslaved to the state. The first approach describes those who wish to overthrow the state. In this group are revolutionaries of all kinds who think the current order is corrupt and inhumane. This is a negative enslavement of opposition, whereby one becomes attached to the state in one's opposition to it. The second group are those who sacralize the present order. The first group thinks the state profane; the second group thinks the state sacred.

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's quote implies that there is a way of not being a slave to human masters. By condemning both extremes, Bonhoeffer must have imagined that we could exist in a condition of non-slavery. The position advocated here proposes one way this might occur through a third, more neutral, view: the state as mundane, or as a mere instrument. This position requires showing that the state is neither sacred, nor profane. In practice this is done by desacralizing and deprofanizing the state from either extreme so that it can sit in between as mundane.

This basic schema provides a way of analysing the contemporary politicalologies of John Milbank and William Cavanaugh. As opponents of the established order, both Milbank and Cavanaugh write about the evils of the state, and propose that true

87. Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 56. Here Thomas relies on Karl Marx, "'On the Jewish Question'," in *Marx: Early Political Writings*, ed. Joseph O'Malley and Richard A. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28–56.

88. Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 57.

89. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 239.

90. *Ibid.*, 241.

politics exists solely in the church. In the light of Bonhoeffer's analysis, the following chapters will consider how Milbank and Cavanaugh rebel against the present order by making the state appear profane.

The Sacred, the Mundane, and the Profane

The title of this dissertation refers to the 'political' and the 'profane' as two adjectives associated with the 'church' and 'state'. This usage should not be taken to suggest that these form a pair. 'Profane' is usually paired with 'sacred', with the political being of a different order. The position taken here is that the church should be wary of adopting any notion of sacred *or* profane politics, recalling Bonhoeffer's anxiety that judging the political in such ways can lead to bondage to unchristian ideologies.⁹¹

The terminology of sacred/profane became popular in the field of religion with Émile Durkheim, who proposed that all phenomena in societies fit into either a sacred or profane category.⁹² The formulation here differs from Durkheim's technical sociological use, with 'profane' following the more colloquial meaning of indecent, polluting, and unhallowed, and 'sacred' meaning the opposite – that is: hallowed and an object of devotion. Unlike Durkheim's distinct categories, here the sacred and profane exist on a continuum, so that something can be more or less sacred or profane, and between them sits the mundane. The mundane is something ordinary, commonplace, and something lacking the positive association of the sacred and the negative connotation of the profane. In this position, the mundane has neutrality.⁹³ This threefold schema not only breaks the unhelpful dichotomy of sacred and profane, but envisages a sliding scale of sacral value on a continuum from sacred to profane. Using this scale, we can then describe how it is one can move along it. To sacralize (or deprofanize) means to move toward the sacred, while to profane (or desacralize) means to move toward the profane. Sacralization means to make an object more sacred, while desacralization, a topic covered extensively in Chapter 6, means to remove sacral value from an object.

The following chapters will show that Milbank and Cavanaugh think that the state is profane in opposition to those they think have given it sacred value. The position upheld here sits between these and is that in the Christian political imagination the state should be considered as neither sacred nor profane, but as mundane. The state, as the work of human hands, is never inherently sacred, even if it can be thought to be sacred by politicians or by citizens. Any sacral value of the state exists solely in the political imagination of people. The state may wish to claim sacral value because it

91. See quotation on page 18.

92. See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 37–42.

93. This formulation is borrowed from W. E. H. Stanner, "Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal Religion," in *Social Organization: Essays Presented to Raymond Firth*, ed. Maurice Freedman (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 217–240.

wishes to gain adherents and claim legitimacy. The judgment of the state exists more in the realm of the political imagination when the state is imagined to be bringing a better future, solving problems, and punishing evil, in ways that displace God. Likewise, the state is not profane in and of itself. It can, however, be thought of as profane when it is seen as standing in the way of our preservation and redemption. When the state uses violence, tortures, kills, and encroaches into people's lives, we may say the state is profane. If the state is considered profane, as Milbank and Cavanaugh think it is, then it is something that Christians and churches should avoid, ruling out their political engagement with the state.

God's Work in Creation, Preservation, and Redemption

The following chapters will look more closely at how the state has been understood theologically in various traditions, providing a framework for assessing the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh. This framework will be based on the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption. Here the starting point is reflection on the creative, preservative, and redemptive works of God, rather than on the human condition. This latter view can be seen in the more common Reformed narrative of 'creation, fall, and redemption' that many believe ought to guide Christians' ethical and political thought.⁹⁴ It should be observed that this narrative of 'creation, fall, redemption' is human-centered, with the emphasis falling on humanity's status as a creature, fallen through sin, and in need of redemption.⁹⁵ By contrast, the emphasis here is on the work of God as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. The objects of this work extend beyond individual human souls to creation as a whole, including human society, its preservation, and ultimate redemption. This detaches the adopted framework from a strict association with Reformed thought, which is alien to Milbank and Cavanaugh.⁹⁶

Across theological traditions, the divine acts of creation, preservation, and redemption describe the great works of God, and describe a large divine meta-narrative. Human recognition of these works have inspired thanks and praise to God for His

94. See, for instance, Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Richard J. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 19; Charles W. Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), xiii, 14; David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 30, 31, 40, 41, 189.

95. Watson calls such a 'fall/redemption' model 'anthropomonistic', since it relegates the created order to be a mere backdrop for the all-consuming human drama of redemption. See Francis Watson, *In the Beginning: Irenaeus, Creation and the Environment*, ed. David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 129.

96. Milbank, in particular, has been critical of Reformed forms of thought. See John Milbank, "Stale Expressions: The Management-Shaped Church," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 264–276; John Milbank, "Alternative Protestantism: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 25–41.

works of creation, preservation, and redemption. For instance, Pseudo-Dionysius identifies God as the ‘source’ of all things, their ‘preserver’ and ‘the One who brings them to completion’.⁹⁷ The seventeenth-century Anglo-Catholic Bishop William Beveridge uses the formula several times in his *Thesaurus Theologicus*.⁹⁸ Another Anglican, Samuel Johnson, in his birthday prayer of 1738, blesses God for his ‘Creation, Preservation, and Redemption.’⁹⁹ Austrian Jesuit Francis Xavier Weninger also finds in ‘the wonders of creation, preservation and redemption’ reasons to praise God.¹⁰⁰ That several traditions affirm creation, preservation, and redemption as the works of God, justifies Douglas John Hall’s assessment that this is the customary way of classifying them.¹⁰¹ But how do these works relate to the work of governing human societies? Can the institutions and practices of human government be described as works of God located in creation, preservation, or redemption?

Many theologians have linked one or more of these doctrines to political authorities. The formulation also has several adherents in relating this schema to the Christian understanding of politics.¹⁰² The schema takes up the ‘chief problem’ Paul Ramsey found in Christian ethical analysis: ‘This is the question how, in moral decision and action, the Christian’s response to God the Creator, his response to God the Ruler and Preserver of this fallen world, and his response to God the Redeemer stand in indivisible relation to each other; and where the stress falls in cases of concrete decision.’¹⁰³ Similarly, Joan Lockwood O’Donovan notes that liberalism has derailed Christian political thought and its biblical doctrines of ‘created moral structures’, God’s providential establishment of political authority, and redemption through the coming of the Kingdom of Christ.¹⁰⁴

As will be seen in the following chapters, there are several reasons for adopting this tripartite formulation as a tool to assess the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh. First, it takes account of the time between creation and redemption. As

97. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, “The Divine Names,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibhéid, with an introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich, with a foreword by Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), §596C.

98. William Beveridge, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge: Volume X, Thesaurus Theologicus* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847), 57, 267, 291, 348.

99. Samuel Johnson, *Doctor Johnson’s Prayers*, ed. Elton Trueblood (London: SCM Press, 1947), 57.

100. Francis Xavier Weninger, *A Manual of the Catholic Religion, for Catechists, Teachers and Self-Instruction*, 6th ed. (Cincinnati: John P. Walsh, 1867), 184. Also see Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Devout Exercises of the Heart, in Meditation, Soliloquy, Prayer, and Praise* (Philadelphia: I. Watts, 1791), 88.

101. Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 72–73.

102. See Rockne McCarthy, Donald Oppewal, Walfred Peterson, and Gordon Spykman, *Society, State, & Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 162–163; and Nigel Wright, “Government as an ambiguous power,” in *God and Government*, ed. Nick Spencer and Jonathan Chaplin (London: SPCK, 2009), 27–30.

103. Paul Ramsey, *Christian Ethics and the Sit-In* (New York: Association Press, 1961), 126–127.

104. Joan Lockwood O’Donovan made these observations in an interview by Rupert Shortt published as Oliver O’Donovan, Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, and Rupert Shortt, “Political Theology,” in *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, by Rupert Shortt (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), 252–253.

discussed in Chapter 4, it is in this time we need to be preserved for redemption. This is important to exclude realized eschatologies creeping too far forward into the present. While both Milbank and Cavanaugh write about creation and redemption, this schema highlights their omission of any consideration of preservation, which, as Chapter 4 shows, has been a traditional way of understanding the state in Christian theology. The secondary justification for this outline is that a theological reading of the traditions of both secular and Christian political thought shows that it is over these doctrines that traditions compete. Sometimes the state has been understood, idolatrously, to displace God as the creator, preserver, or redeemer of human society. At other times, God is sometimes believed to be altogether removed from using the state in his creative, preservative, and redemptive work in human society. Statists and anti-statists (or anarchists) differ on many questions, including those relating to the origins of modern society, how society is preserved, and how human and societal problems are solved. By applying these theological categories to political thought, we can see where they differ on how they understand the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption as relating to the political sphere.

This schema has been used by others in attempting to classify other views of the state. As discussed in later chapters, it fits the three main doctrinal ways of understanding the state in German theology: as an order of creation (*Schöpfungsordnung*), an order of preservation (*Erhaltungsordnung*), or as an order of redemption (*Erlösungsordnung*). Picking any one of these orders as the proper locale of the state is problematic. In his book on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s view of the state, Michael Long points out that King thought it futile to attempt to locate the state in the order of creation, the order of preservation, or the order of redemption, since, as he saw it, there is 'a role for the state in the whole work of God—in creation, preservation, and reconciliation.'¹⁰⁵ This perspective is at odds with the desire to attempt to locate the state in one of these three positions. As shown in the following chapters, the reaction against placing the state in the order of creation (as it was in Nazi theology) encouraged others, such as Bonhoeffer and Barth, to relocate the state in the orders of preservation and redemption. Arguably, the perceived need to connect the state to the immediate works of God is a false consciousness too. With this schema, theologians are often tempted to place the state in one of these three categories. But, as will be shown in the following chapters, to select one category risks giving an unnecessarily positive evaluation of the state. For anti-statist theologians, the state can be seen as bringing destruction to society (as an anti-preserver), or as something standing in the way of the redemption of society (as an anti-redeemer). Milbank and Cavanaugh share a negative evaluation of the state, and do not see the state in any of the three classic

105. Michael G. Long, *Against Us, But For Us: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the State* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), xiv–xv.

orders, but in their opposites. So the schema is not just useful for classifying those for whom the state is a sacred order of God, but also those who think it is profane.

God's Work and Idolization of the State

The leverage of the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption in political theology can be further illuminated by the notion of idolatry. In its broadest and most useful definition, 'idolatry' means putting something in the place of God.¹⁰⁶ This includes, but cannot be reduced to, the worship of things other than God. Worshipping idols is certainly condemned in Scripture and the Christian tradition, but the definition used here also includes the substituting of things for God in other ways. These distinctions are illuminated by the landmark study of idolatry by Jewish scholars Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit.¹⁰⁷ They write that the 'ban on idolatry is the attempt to dictate exclusivity, to map the unique territory of the one God.'¹⁰⁸ This exclusivity has two features. The first is worship: we may only worship and make sacrifices to the true God. The second, which is more relevant to the present discussion, is the 'attribution of forces and adjectives that are supposed to be exclusive to a single force.'¹⁰⁹

Following this definition of idolatry, idols are not only those things worshipped instead of God, but also those things we attribute with the powers of God. Idols are those things we put our trust in, and this can include the state. Luther made the point this way:

For not only the adoration of images is idolatry but also trust in one's own righteousness, works, and merits, and putting confidence in riches and human power. As the latter is the commonest, so it also is the most noxious idolatry . . . How godless do you think it is to rely on these things and to reject confidence in the eternal and omnipotent God?¹¹⁰

Why would people put their trust in things other than God, including the state? For the reason that these idols are imagined to have the powers that have traditionally been attributed to God. The authors of the First Helvetic Confession (1536), were clear to delimit the attribution of power to ministers of the Church when they wrote: 'that in all things we ascribe all efficacy and power to God the Lord alone, and only the imparting to the minister. For it is certain that this power and efficacy never should

106. This definition is also used by Paul Marshall, *Thine Is The Kingdom: A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 78.

107. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

108. *Ibid.*, 5.

109. *Ibid.*, 5.

110. Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology, Volume II: Glory — Prayer*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), §2110.

or can be attributed to a creature, but God dispenses it to those He chooses according to His free will.¹¹¹ Likewise, we need to attribute divine attributes solely to God and not to the state.

This is the central point: the state becomes sacralized and an idol when it is attributed with autonomous powers to create, preserve, and redeem separate from the action of God. Christian theology teaches, as the following chapters will show, that God and only God, can properly be described as our creator, preserver, and redeemer. Such attributes may only be applied to God; applying these identifiers to a state, or any other work of human hands, makes these creations into imposters of God.¹¹² Attuned to this temptation, the authors of Scripture emphasized that God alone should be ascribed certain powers (1 Chronicles 16:25–29). Similarly, in two Psalms laden with political imagery (Psalm 29:1–2; Psalm 96:7–8), creatures, whether heavenly or formed into peoples, are to attribute power to God, with the implication that they are to turn from idolatry.¹¹³ Condemned here, then, is the ascription of the powers of creation, preservation, and redemption to the state instead of God. These condemnations are also found in Scripture.

Scripture not only affirms God as the sole Creator, but also condemns idolatry which ascribes the power of creation to creatures and idols. In Jeremiah 2:27–28 we find Israel condemned for ascribing their origins to trees or stones, which are also upheld as saviours. Calvin comments on this passage: ‘the Prophet points out here what is especially to be detested in idolatry, and that is, the transferring of the honor, due to God, to statues, not only as to the external act by bending the knee before them, but by seeking salvation from them.’¹¹⁴ In Acts 14:15 worthless, powerless idols are compared to the God ‘who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.’ By contrast to the works of the true God, the works of the gods and idols are worthless (Isaiah 41:29).

Idols are sometimes ascribed with preservative powers by idolaters seeking in the lifeless idol the providence that the biblical tradition says can be found in God alone. This form of idolatry is condemned in Wisdom of Solomon where safe passage at sea is sought through a lifeless wooden idol, rather than through trust in God’s providence. In this passage (Wisdom of Solomon 14:5–7) the false faith of the idolater is contrasted with the faith of Noah, who allowed himself to be guided safely over the waters by God’s hand (Genesis 8).

With respect to redemption, Scripture rejects the notion that salvation can come from idols, such as that mocked in Isaiah 44:17. Under the new covenant, according

111. Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., “The First Helvetic Confession, 1536,” in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM Press, 1966), §15.

112. See William Stringfellow, *Imposters of God: Inquiries into Favorite Idols* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 6.

113. See James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 308.

114. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations: Volume 1*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 127.

to the author of 1 Peter, true redemption comes through Jesus, not from mere metals, even precious ones: 'You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.' (1 Peter 1:18–19). While affirming the priceless value of Jesus's blood, as it is commonly read, this passage also tells what cannot redeem us: idols – even those of silver or gold (cf. Isaiah 30:22; Isaiah 31:7; Acts 17:29; Revelation 9:20).

The proper ascription of the powers of creation, preservation, and redemption to God alone is developed in later chapters. Here we note that putting things in the place of God in these ways is one way we can understand idolatry. The concern expressed here is that the state not be made into a political idol by being put in the place of God. But this is not the only danger. The state should not be wholly condemned and seen as completely removed from the works of God. To suggest this would imply that God plays no rôle in creating the state, preserving it, or redeeming it. Moreover, this position would suggest that God does not use the state as a tool in preserving or redeeming human society. Against such a position, the freedom of God can be affirmed so that God is free to relate to the state in these ways.

When does the state become sacred or profane? The state becomes profane when it is perceived to stand in the way of our preservation or redemption, or when it comes from profane origins. Given the sliding scale between sacred and profane outlined above, it will never be easy to say when this line has been crossed. But one approach to this question comes from Barth and the Confessing Church when they were confronted with the political question of National Socialism. For some time, the National Socialists confronted the church with only a *political* problem ('Whether German National Socialism . . . will become to-morrow or the day after, first, the form of our Society in Europe, and thus the form of our social structure as well, and so the form of society which surrounds and conditions the Church in this area, and what attitude we propose to adopt to this possibility.'¹¹⁵), but once they confronted the church with a *religious* problem, the time had come for the church to reject a neutral stance toward the party.¹¹⁶ This line was crossed, as Barth observed, when the Party presented itself as 'a *religious institution of salvation*.'¹¹⁷ Barth refers to the Party as a religious institution because in National Socialism he finds the self-belief that 'it itself is able to be and to give to man and to all men everything for body and soul, for life and death, for time and eternity.'¹¹⁸ This is an example of statism, because the state alone is claimed to be sufficient. We may also call it idolization of the state, where the state becomes a false god in which one is asked to place all one's faith and trust.

115. Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), 22–23.

116. *Ibid.*, 36–39.

117. *Ibid.*, 41. Barth's italics.

118. *Ibid.*, 41.

This section has concentrated on rejecting an idolization, or false sacralization, of the state whereby it is attributed with the powers of God. When we make the state our creator, preserver, or redeemer apart from God, we make it into an idol. The key phrase here is 'apart from God', for there seems no reason why the state cannot be a vehicle for the works of God. If idolatrous sacralization is the elevation of the state into the place of God, then the opposite is the profanation of the state, so that the state becomes completely separated from God or even viewed as demonic. Related to the three-fold framework used here, if one implies that the state is profane, then they also mean by that, that God has no use for the state in the creation, preservation, or redemption of humans or their societies. Within such a perspective, the state becomes autonomous, and not an agent in God's work. In its idolatrous sacralization, the state becomes autonomous in creating, preserving, and redeeming society; in its profanation, the state becomes autonomous in its separation from and opposition to God.

In contemporary political theology is it likely that more attention has been given to the notion of the idolatrous sacralization of the state in politics than has been given to the idea that the state is outside the utilization of God. There are several reasons why this might be so. First, there are well-known extreme examples of states that have claimed near divine status for themselves in ordering the lives of their people. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union serve as good examples of this; this more easily seen with the benefit of hindsight. It is relatively more difficult to show how a country has profanized its state and has attempted to show how the state is completely separate from God's work. Second, the profanation of the state is associated with anarchism, which has been a minority tradition in Christianity and remains largely incongruous to the political imagination of the majority of people. Anarchists, in avoiding the idolatry of the state have been accused of making an idol out of freedom.¹¹⁹ Third, dismissing the state as a work and tool of God requires relocating the political function to somewhere else. This problem has plagued anti-statism: What do you put in the state's place? For the secular anarchist, it is the self-governing sovereign individual or community. For Milbank and Cavanaugh, as seen in the following chapters, this is the church. Both the autonomous individual or the political church can become idols. Bernd Wannenwetsch illustrates how, by avoiding the idolization of the state, theologians can be led to idolize the church:

At the same time, however, if out of fear that civil religion can become idolatry, the Church thinks that it must refrain from a public engagement of faith, it incurs the danger of making an idol of itself. It is this which pins down the difficulty of seeing the Church as a counter-society at its theologically most tricky point. The Church would acquire the

119. Ernst Victor Zenker, *Anarchism: A Criticism and History of the Anarchist Theory* (London: Methuen, 1898), 4.

characteristics of an idol itself if it tried to preserve its purity by refusing to enter into the ambivalence of civil religion which an involvement in the civil and public sphere brings with it.¹²⁰

While the anti-statists are right to reject the idolatry of the state, the main line of criticism here takes a different theological angle. This is that the anti-statists, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, have down-played the notion that a free God can and may use the state, as the work of human hands, for God's purposes in relation to human society.

A central problem thrown up by this consideration of idolatry is this: if our loyalty to God is absolute and includes political loyalty, then what loyalty do Christians have to the civil powers?¹²¹ Both the Torah and Jesus were clear that we cannot serve two masters (Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 6:24), but the Christian tradition has often affirmed obedience to civic authorities as forming part of our loyalty to God. This may lead some to believe that if we worship God then it is self-evident that we are free from idolatry – especially if they consider the definition of idolatry to be limited to the worship of things in the place of God. But Scripture also warns of a syncretism where those who worship God also worship other gods and swear oaths by them (see 1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 17:41; Zephaniah 1:5). This tendency reached right into the temple, as seen in the purge of idols by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:1–15). Luther's interpretation of Zephaniah 1:5 illustrates what is at stake in political theology at this juncture. He says that Christians must swear by God alone and worship only him. Part of what serving God means is that we must also obey our rulers. But we must never mix the two; while we *obey* our rulers we must never *place our trust* in them, as trust is reserved for God alone.¹²² Pressing this point further, we sacralize the state when we go beyond obedience to the state, and place our trust in the state for those things that only God can provide.

The state as a possible agent of God is not ruled out by Scripture, but has support in so far as rulers and nation can be vehicles of God's working and self-revelation. The major prophets bring the judgment of God to Israel, who uses rulers and whole nations and empires as agents of his action.¹²³ An example is Assyria, the tool of God's judgment against Jerusalem (see Isaiah 10:5–10). Another from Jeremiah is where King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is raised up by God to bring punishment on

120. Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 266.

121. Richard Liong-Seng Phua, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8.1–11.1 in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 33.

122. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Zephaniah," in *Luther's Works, Volume 18: Lectures on the Lectures on Minor Prophets I: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Richard J. Dinda (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1975), 323–325.

123. See Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 93.

Israel (Jeremiah 25:1–11).¹²⁴ But God not only uses rulers as agents of judgment and correction; God raises and anoints rulers for positions of liberation and the enactment of justice. God used the prophet Samuel to anoint King Saul to bring God's deliverance of his people from the Philistines (1 Samuel 9:15–17).

Scripture and the Political Imagination

Method

Scripture has already been used above, and it is cited throughout the following chapters. One reason for the use of Scripture here is that, by contrast, Milbank and Cavanaugh do not use it very often in their political theology (the reasons for this are discussed below on page 175). This contrast will illuminate the question of how Milbank and Cavanaugh can be doing political *theology*, when one of the key sources for theology is largely absent. While it is widely acknowledged that the bible does not prescribe a political system, it has played an influential rôle in the church's traditions of reflection on political matters, and in pre-modern times it was a, if not *the*, primary source in forming the Christian political imagination. That the Bible has been a constant source of inspiration to theologians and ethicists on political matters means that they have, in every generation, found ways to relate Scripture to their own situation. This tradition of biblical political theology remains an important but, in contemporary times, underrated source for political theology.

While it has always been an important source in Christian political thought, the application of Scripture to modern politics raises many problems. To Christian ethicist Allen Verhey, these problems include the silence of Scripture on modern questions, the strangeness of Scripture, its diversity, its being difficult to understand, and the abuse of Scripture in politics.¹²⁵ These problems are real, but they need not be fatal to the use of Scripture in political theology. The approach taken here is alert to these difficulties, believing that they can be overcome by adopting a method influenced by 'biblical realism' and which follows the plain sense of Scripture.

According to John Howard Yoder, it was the Dutch Reformed missionary Hendrik Kraemer who invented the term *biblical realism*. For Yoder this method says: '“To the extent we can, we seek to understand the Bible in its own terms, to think the way the Bible thinks, to use its thought patterns rather than our modern thought patterns, to ask what questions the Bible is asking, so that we will hear the Bible's answers as answers to the right questions, rather than taking our modern questions straight to

124. Brueggemann, in commentating on this passage in Jeremiah makes the point that this illustrates the claim that 'God governs gentile history as well as Israelite history (cf. Amos 9:7).' Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids; Edinburgh: Eerdmans; Handsel Press, 1988), 213.

125. Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 334–336.

the Bible.”¹²⁶ Some of the advantages of biblical realism were stated by John Howard Yoder in this fashion:

One of the strengths of this position is that it opens one’s mind to take seriously the elements that have been forgotten over the centuries, such as the place of the demonic in the biblical view of society. It enables people to be open to the possibility that the Bible might think with a different logic than we think with and not necessarily be usable for the kinds of proof our apologetics, for instance, use. This school of thought arose by refusing to take sides between modern fundamentalism and liberalism.¹²⁷

Yoder was likely to have been influenced into adopting this approach by Karl Barth, his teacher at Basel, and Barth’s other followers. For Yoder, biblical realism provides a middle way between ‘fundamentalism and liberalism’, both of which Yoder rejects. These polarized positions may also be described as the ‘Literalism and Expressivism’ which Barth’s ‘hermeneutical realism’ finds a way between.¹²⁸ For Barth, historical criticism was mere prolegomenon for real biblical interpretation. In the preface to his *Römerbrief*, Barth complained that commentators only established and reiterated the text. For Barth, an example of someone following a better approach is Calvin, who wrestled with texts,

till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent! Paul speaks, and the man of the sixteenth century hears. The conversation between the original record and the reader moves round the subject-matter, until a distinction between yesterday and to-day becomes impossible.¹²⁹

In Barth’s view, the Bible is as real today as ever and speaks directly to our times, whenever we live. The main advantages of biblical realism is that it adopts the position that the truth of the Bible does not rest on external validation, and also that we inhabit a world which is made understandable by use of the Bible.

This biblical realism is supplemented by use of the plain sense of Scripture, or what Yoder would call the ‘straightforwardness’ of the text, a position he recognizes in George Lindbeck.¹³⁰ The plain sense, or literal sense (*sensus literalis*) of Scripture

126. John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 311.

127. John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 390.

128. George Hunsinger, “Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth’s Hermeneutical Realism,” *Modern Theology* 3, no. 3 (1987): 209.

129. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7. Ellul, another follower of biblical realism, made similar remarks about commentators in *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 12. Also see Ronald R. Ray, “Jacques Ellul’s Innocent Notes on Hermeneutics,” *Interpretation* 33, no. 3 (1979): 268–282.

130. John Howard Yoder, “Validation by Induction,” in *To Hear the Word*, 2nd ed., with a foreword by Michael J. Gorman (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 146–147.

follows the meaning normally accepted by the community of faith. One benefit of the plain sense is that the text remains accessible to all. This is critical for it to be able to form a people's political imagination, through the established channels of Christian formation, initiation, confirmation, proclamation, and education.

The Yale theologian Hans Frei, an advocate of the plain sense, saw in traditionally realistic readings three modes of unity. First, that the biblical story was to be read literally as it referred to real historical circumstances. Second, there is a unity of narrative across both Old and New Testaments. Third, this narrative encompasses all times and places, embracing 'the experience of any present age and reader.'¹³¹ With regards to Frei's first point, this perspective does not limit the meaning of bible stories and events just to history, but instead acknowledges that there is a meaning in these events which can reveal something about God's relationship to humanity. In valuing the narrative unity of the Biblical story of creation, preservation, and redemption, the following chapters draw almost evenly from both the Old and New Testaments. This is for the reason that both Testaments are part of a grand biblical narrative story that begins in Genesis and concludes in Revelation and in the process demonstrates the movement from creation to preservation for redemption. Throughout this story, there is no simple political message. It cannot, at the risk of sacralizing the state, be reduced to simple obedience to the state based on Romans 13. Nor can Scripture simply be deployed for an anarchist ethic of resistance to the state (based on verses like Acts 5:29). Scripture is diverse, and this diversity bears on the importance given to all texts typically used in political theology. Also to be noted are references to the Apocryphal books, which played an important rôle in the formation of the Christian political tradition before the Reformation. On Frei's third point, Lindbeck writes in a similar fashion that 'A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe.'¹³² This universality of the biblical story makes the biblical revelation pertain to all aspects of politics including contemporary reflections on the state.

The value of narrative to Christian theology is an emphasis of the Yale School, in particular the work of Lindbeck. He writes: 'To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms.'¹³³ The important corollary of this view is that learning to be a Christian helps one to see other stories as non-Christian, especially those offering idols in the place of God.

131. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 2–3.

132. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 103.

133. *Ibid.*, 20.

The Use of Scripture in the Formation of the Political Imagination

The purpose of using Scripture here is to nourish a Christian political imagination, which sees the political teachings of Scripture as relevant for contemporary political theology. This relevance derives from the notion of continuity between the biblical world and ours. Using Scripture as a resource for reimagining our political options draws heavily on Walter Brueggemann's corpus.¹³⁴ Brueggemann defines the imagination as 'the capacity to entertain images of meaning and reality that are out beyond the evident givens of the observable experience.'¹³⁵ One's political imagination can also be described using Brueggemann's notion of a 'script', something which everyone adopts in their own way or understanding reality and their place within it. This script is analogous to the imagination of Cavanaugh and the *mythos* of Milbank (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). All three notions are similar in that they describe ways in which we form commitments and allegiances, and think about the rôle of the state in society. While the dominant script in modernity has had the state and the global market in increasingly dominant rôles, Brueggemann believes that Scripture offers an alternative script to that of modern secular society.¹³⁶ Following Brueggemann's lead, Scriptures have been selected and used here at points where they pose questions about the modern state.

The similarities between Milbank and Cavanaugh and Brueggemann can only be taken so far. Lisa P. Stephenson has written on the similarities between the work of Brueggemann and Cavanaugh, but the following draws on the differences between them.¹³⁷ The main similarity is in their use of the term 'imagination'. In Brueggemann this is his notion of the 'prophetic imagination', in Cavanaugh it is his notion of the 'theopolitical imagination'. While both wish to counterpoise the political imagination of the state with a Christian political imagination, there is only a superficial similarity between them. Brueggemann's political imagination is not simply political, but scriptural, even 'evangelical'.¹³⁸ Conversely, Cavanaugh's theopolitical imagination is liturgical or, more specifically, Eucharistical. While Cavanaugh opposes the politics of the state with the politics of the church, Brueggemann opposes the totalizing claims of the state, leaving room for a state which knows its place under God, and leaves the church free to imagine a better state.

134. Brueggemann's main writings on the imagination are *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), and *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Others can be found in the bibliography.

135. Walter Brueggemann, "Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection," in *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 28.

136. Walter Brueggemann, "Counterscript: Living with the Elusive God," *Christian Century* 122, no. 24 (2005): 22–28.

137. See Lisa P. Stephenson, "Prophetically Political, Politically Prophetic: William Cavanaugh's 'Theopolitical Imagination' as an Example of Walter Brueggemann's 'Prophetic Imagination'," *Journal of Church and State* 53, no. 4 (July 2011): 567–586.

138. Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 26–56.

How have these perspectives on Scripture informed and shaped the use of the Bible in the following argument? In pursuing a political imagination that judges the state to be neither sacred nor profane, the emphasis has been put on the actual use made of the Bible by theologians reflecting on Scriptures in developing political theologies. This is partly to show that a traditional return to patristic and confessional sources, as they are envisioned within Radical Orthodoxy, can challenge existing political philosophies and theologies. For this reason, much use is made of other theologians' use of Scripture and the debates between them, as these show what is at stake in political readings of Scripture.

Scripture here is used in two main ways: to illustrate doctrines and theological points made, and to offer texts that can build a renewed political imagination. The illustrative approach is used when outlining the doctrines that frame the thesis's central three chapters.¹³⁹ This method largely follows the use of texts in systematic presentations of doctrines as found in the work of theologians and confessional summaries of the theological positions of Christian communities. Second, and more importantly, the application of Scripture to contemporary politics depends on an analogical use of texts. Since, as the above section on the concept of the state shows, there is no modern 'state' in the Bible, the use of Scripture in contemporary political theology faces the problem of relating Scripture to our contemporary situation.¹⁴⁰ One solution to this problem is to adopt an analogical approach of applying these texts to our modern situation.¹⁴¹ The history of the interpretation of 'political' Scriptures shows that this method has always informed Christian political theology. A classic case would be commentary on Matthew 22:21 ('Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.' KJV), which has spoken to Christian communities long after the demise of Caesars. The traditional use of analogical application have permitted texts which speak of 'Caesar', 'ruler' and the 'city' to be taken as speaking to forms of political rule, up to and including the modern state. In using the Bible to make sense of our political reality, Hauerwas's suggestion is instructive: 'The Bible does not so much provide a morality as it is the source of images and analogies that help us understand and interpret the nature of our existence.'¹⁴² In offering such analogical biblical reflections, the argument that follows promotes the notion of a biblically-informed political imagination over sacralized

139. This method is common in systematic theology and among Christian ethics, as, for example in Reinhold Niebuhr. See Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15–16.

140. I. Howard Marshall, "Using the Bible in Ethics," in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, ed. David F. Wright (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981), 40–41; Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2010), 3–19.

141. A defence of this method can be found in Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 51–89.

142. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering," in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 59.

politics or the politics of profanity. The notion of political imagination is one that Milbank and, especially, Cavanaugh would recognize. But here the emphasis lies with Scripture providing nourishment for the political imagination, instead of the political imagination Milbank and Cavanaugh find in sacraments and liturgy.

However much the appeal to analogy solves the problem of application, it is useful to think through *how* analogy works. Analogies have to be imagined; they are not givens. Brueggemann, showing how the application of texts to our contemporary situation have to be imagined, writes, 'Interpretation is not the reiteration of the text', but rather, texts become 'materials for imagination that pushed well beyond what is given or intended even in the text.'¹⁴³ As Brueggemann points out, this is a traditional practice of the church, given the widespread recognition that 'a cold reiterative objectivity has no missional energy or moral force'.¹⁴⁴ One example offered by Brueggemann is Barth's imagining that Romans 13 pertains to the obedience of Christians in Communist Hungary.¹⁴⁵

Throughout this work, there is no attempt to be original in the use of Scripture, despite using it imaginatively. It is criticism of the use of Scripture that follows the imagination that it may become *gallus in campanili*.¹⁴⁶ Brueggemann is alert to the dangers of individualist subjective interpretation, which, if not governed by authority, can become 'subjective, partisan, and ideological'.¹⁴⁷ So, to get around this problem, texts cited in the following pages usually follow broadly traditional uses, often from sources within various traditions in a confessional sense. Other texts that have been overlooked by traditional political theologians are used to broaden out the traditional political theology 'canon', but typically follow the interpretations of theologians and biblical scholars in order to illustrate the point that the state is to be considered as neither sacred nor profane. Too often political theologians find a unity in Scripture to support one view or the other. Embracing both views, we can see Scripture's ambivalence toward political authority, which denies any easy evaluation of the state as sacred or profane.

143. Brueggemann, "Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection," 28.

144. *Ibid.*, 28.

145. *Ibid.*, 29. Brueggemann is probably referring here to Barth's writings on Hungary in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946–52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman (London: SCM Press, 1954).

146. Literally, 'the weathercock in the churchtower' which follows the theologian's direction of mind. See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 170.

147. Walter Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality: What We do when We Read the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 25. While applauding the results of Ellul's imaginative work on 2 Kings in *Politics of God*, Brueggemann has concerns about the subjective methodology followed. See, Walter Brueggemann, "Book Review: *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* by Jacques Ellul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (1973): 470–471.

The Use of Scripture in this Work

The individual texts used in the following chapters come from a broader range than is usually found in political theology. While modern political theology may claim that there is a political canon within Holy Scripture, this has not always served the Christian political imagination well. If such a canon were limited to *loci classici* of political theology (Romans 13; Matthew 22:21), one might limit Christian political witness to a slavish ethic of obedience to the state, and constrain the political imagination by a statist *mythos*. These texts have provided a guide to obedience, but rarely to action. Taken alone, they limit the imagination and lack what Lindbeck requires of a text to live by: 'it must in some fashion be construable as a guide to thought and action in the encounter with changing circumstances.'¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, by opening up a wider view on the potential political importance of Scripture, we can rediscover marginal texts that may speak very effectively to our current politics and provide fresh ways of imagining politics and the state. It may be that the dearth of biblically-informed political theology is a product of the focus on the small canon typically used in such work.

In the attempt to enlarge the theopolitical imagination, some Biblical citations are used to illuminate certain points. These have been selected in line with traditional uses of the texts, either from theologians or from confessional standards of the churches. This approach demonstrates that the re-imagining of the theopolitical vision of Christianity does not depend on rethinking, so much as rediscovery, of texts and traditions that have already spoken to the church when considering the civil authorities and its relationship to them. This approach could be criticized on the basis of the hermeneutical principle that some texts carry more doctrinal weight than others, with the implication that in the discussion of political matters there is already a canon within the canon to guide these deliberations. In riposte, it may be ventured that the discovery of this guiding canon would always be guided by theological presuppositions which do not come from Scripture. But it must also be said that there are many political traditions that draw on Scripture and use a range of texts. The rediscovery of such texts and traditions remains a valid theological enterprise.

Chapter Outlines

The next chapter places Milbank and Cavanaugh in the historical and intellectual context of the theological response to the rise of the state and its increasing intrusion into family and other institutions of community life. It focuses on how the responses to the rise of the state took two directions in the church; statist politicization, in which churches sought to influence the state to solve social and moral problems, and, in

148. George A. Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus and Community," in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley, Radical Traditions (London: SCM Press, 2002), 219.

reaction against this statist politicization, a non-statist politicization in which many theologians, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, politicized Christian thought and practice so that the politics of the church was emphasized.

The subsequent three chapters use the doctrinal framework provided by the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption to critically assess the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh. Each doctrine is examined through its biblical and theological background for its political purchase. Then, using these biblical and doctrinal resources as critical tools, the chapters examine how the concept relates to Christian political thought. In the assessment of political programmes of states, use of the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption help to reveal the actual content of political idolatry, moving deeper than analysis of the formal elements of religion into how political idolatry conflicts with faithful Christianity on a doctrinal level.

Chapter 6, the final substantial chapter, advocates a positive theology of theological engagement with the state. The freedom and sovereignty of God over the state is foremost here, and it follows from this that both the church and the Christian are free to relate to the state. Utilizing the thought of Jacques Ellul, this chapter will argue that engagement with the state does not defile the Christian, and the state is not the profane object some theologians make it out to be.

Chapter 7 offers conclusions to the whole work.

Chapter 2

The Sanctified State and the Politicized Church

This chapter places John Milbank and William Cavanaugh within the context of twentieth and twenty-first century political theology, providing contextual background for the rest of the thesis in two ways. First, it will examine the rise and expansion of the modern state since the late nineteenth century. In doing so, the chapter shows how the rise of the state not only changed the political landscape, but became a matter for theological debate, with some theologians and church bodies wishing that the state would increase its powers to address serious social problems, while others reacted against the increased scope of state activity. Second, it places Milbank and Cavanaugh into the stream of politicized theology, which was a product of the reaction to this rise of the state. The chapter shows how theology has been politicized in both statist and anti-statist forms, with Milbank and Cavanaugh belonging to this latter category.

The chapter highlights that Milbank and Cavanaugh react against the statist politicization of theology by politicizing theology in an anti-statist key, especially in their politicized ecclesiology. While arguing against a profane state and its effects on the church, they argue for a political church. This chapter proposes that with the rise of the state in the twentieth century, society became more politicized in a statist fashion, with the result that forms of thought, including theology, also became more politicized. While some theology became more statist, there was also a reaction against the state in non-statist political theology, including that of Milbank and Cavanaugh, as well as others within Radical Orthodoxy.

The accounts Milbank and Cavanaugh give to the origins and rise of the modern state are saved for the next chapter, so here the purpose is to locate their concerns in theological debates over the rise of the state, and place them in various traditions of thought which shared this concern, such as political pluralism. This chapter has three main sections. The first considers how the rise of the state contributed to the politicization of society. The second section considers the politicization of

theology, especially in a statist direction. The third and final section considers how the theological movement of Radical Orthodoxy reacted against this statist politicization, and developed a non-statist political theology.

The Rise of Politicization

What is meant by ‘politicization’, and how does it come about? This section introduces this concept and its statist and non-statist forms. ‘Politicization’ simply means ‘becoming more political’ or ‘having become more political’.¹ This is a suitable definition of the noun, since it only means an increase in politics. Up to a certain point, politicization of a society can be useful in raising people’s political consciousness, but beyond a certain point politicization crosses a line and creates a politicized phenomenon (it should be noted that when the term ‘politicization’ is used below it will usually mean making something more political to the point where something is politicized). ‘Politicized’, the concept’s adjectival form, means having made something political to the point where politics becomes the predominant frame of reference to the exclusion of other ways of regarding something.² The main concern of this chapter is with the politicization of theology until theology is politicized along either statist or non-statist lines.

Before dealing with the politicization of theology, this statist/non-statist dichotomy needs to be examined. The above definition shifts the work of defining the terms ‘politicization’ and ‘politicized’ back onto the definition of ‘politics’. As seen in the previous chapter there are statist and non-statist definitions of politics. For R. M. Hartwell politicization ‘takes the manifest form of increasing power of the state’.³ To link politicization with increased state powers in this way demands a definition of ‘politics’ as having to do with the state.⁴ But, since the definition of ‘politics’ differs from the definition of ‘state’, as discussed in Chapter 1, politicization here need not mean the same as intensified ‘statism’. By adopting a definition of the ‘political’ which the state and non-state actors, politicization can take statist and non-statist forms. Politicization does not simply take these two forms independently. Creeping statist politicization has engendered non-statist politicization as a reaction among those who believe that the state that has extended its scope too far. This is because those who resist statist politicization have wanted to find a way in which one can be political but remain non-statist. If they cannot, ‘politics’ can have no place in their thought. This is

1. Thomas Halper and Richard Hartwig, “Politics and Politicization: An Exercise in Definitional Bridge-Building,” *Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (1975): 77.

2. This definition owes much to the discussion of politicization in James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

3. R. M. Hartwell, “Introduction,” in *The Politicization of Society*, ed. Kenneth S. Templeton Jr. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), 15.

4. For Ellul, who sees politics as being to do with the state, ‘politicization’ is also to do with the rise of the state. Ellul, *Political Illusion*, 9.

where the difference between 'politics' and the 'state' makes the largest difference: in being able to argue that one can be political outside of the state. Non-statist politicization, therefore, will refer to making something more political in the terms of non-state human societies (including the church), recognizing the importance of these non-state actors in how society is governed alongside, or in opposition to, the state. Whether politicization is seen in a positive or negative light, will then depend on what one's definition of 'politics' is, and how one views politics. Those who define politics as something to do with the state, and also hold a negative view of the state, will view politicization in a negative light.

'Politicization' can be defined with reference to individuals or to societies.⁵ It can also be applied to the church and its theology, resulting in 'politicized theology', which can take both statist and non-statist forms. But where in theology does the line get crossed between a proper interest in politics and politicized theology? A criterion for this was given by Cardinal Ratzinger in his criticism of liberation theology. In this theological movement he found, 'A radical politicization of faith's affirmations and of theological judgments', which he thought followed from its conception of 'class struggle as the fundamental law of history'. For Ratzinger, this had the following effects:

The question no longer has to do with simply drawing attention to the consequences and political implications of the truths of faith, which are respected beforehand for their transcendent value. In this new system, every affirmation of faith or of theology is subordinated to a political criterion, which in turn depends on the class struggle, the driving force of history.⁶

While Ratzinger was writing here about the importance of the 'class struggle' to Marxist-influenced liberation theology, it would be possible to place other political philosophies, such as democracy or pluralism, at the core of the politicization of theology. But for purposes of clarifying the meaning of 'politicization', Ratzinger usefully points to where the line is crossed between the proper recognition of the political implications of faith and where theology is subordinated to political concerns. This would take the form of making politics the start and end point of theological reflection and to elevate the 'political' meaning of Christian doctrines and practices over other theological values.

Having now defined 'politicization' and how the politicization of theology occurs, the main concern of the remainder of this section is with the notion that the rise of

5. Halper and Hartwig, *"Politics and Politicization."*

6. Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'," Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican, August 6, 1984, <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html> (accessed April 21, 2013), IX.6.

the modern state encouraged the development of a statist form of politicization in the churches, and, in reaction to that, indirectly to non-statist forms of politicization. This latter form has taken a forthright form in the writings of Radical Orthodox theologians, including Milbank and Cavanaugh.

The theological understanding of the modern state is a key topic in Christian political thought and one that was never far from the minds of theologians in the twentieth century. Theologians gave special attention to the state in the period from the late 1800s to early 1900s because of its expansion into realms which it had never touched before (with this tendency later reaching extreme proportions in Fascism and Soviet Communism). The many accounts that have been given for this rise need not be examined in detail here, as they are secondary to the primary interest in the effects this rise has had on the political imagination of churches and theologians.

The following section prepares the way for the opposition of Radical Orthodoxy's rejection of politics as statecraft. From the widespread acceptance of *laissez-faire* to the acceptance of increased state intervention into all aspects of life, this section covers how these material changes also affected the churches' theopolitical imaginary to accept and, indeed, demand greater state involvement in society.

The Rise of the State and the End of Laissez-Faire

The nineteenth century has been described as the 'Age of Individualism' or an era of *laissez-faire*.⁷ During this period, the state's rôle was considered to be limited to defending individual property rights and the nation. State intervention into the economy and matters of social policy were ruled out by the doctrines of the classical economists (Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus) and John Stuart Mill's maxim that '*Laissez-faire*, in short, should be the general practice: every departure from it, unless required by some great good, is a certain evil.'⁸ The conventional historiography of the period suggests that there was a reaction against this position from about 1870 onward.⁹ A. V. Dicey offered a now famous account of the changes in the nineteenth century that paved the way for greater state intervention:

Somewhere between 1868 and 1900 three changes took place which brought into prominence the authoritative side of Benthamite liberalism. Faith in *laissez faire* suffered an eclipse; hence the principle of utility became an argument in favour, not of individual freedom, but of the absolutism

7. See Edward Shillito, *Christian Citizenship: The Story and Meaning of C.O.P.E.C.* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1925), 2–3; John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), 5.

8. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, ed. J. M. Robson, with an introduction by V. W. Bladen, vol. III, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 945.

9. See Arthur J. Taylor, *Laissez-faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 50–52.

of the State. Parliament under the progress of democracy became the representative, not of the middle classes, but of the whole body of householders; parliamentary sovereignty, therefore, came to mean, in the last resort, the unrestricted power of the wage-earners. English administrative mechanism was reformed and strengthened. The machinery was thus provided for the practical extension of the activity of the State; but, in accordance with the profound Spanish proverb, "the more there is of the more the less there is of the less," the greater the intervention of the Government the less becomes the freedom of each individual citizen.¹⁰

While there is a debate among historians about the conventional account, the history of these changes is not as important to this argument as the generally held view that by the beginning of the twentieth century the age of *laissez-faire* was drawing to a close.¹¹ John Maynard Keynes, in commenting on the demise of *laissez-faire*, observed: 'We do not dance even yet to a new tune. But a change is in the air.'¹² This sentiment was also felt within the churches. In 1909, the American Baptist minister and social reformer Samuel Zane Batten noted, 'That great changes are imminent in our modern world, that a new age is struggling to the birth, that a new order of society is impending, that political institutions are still evolving, and that the State must assume some new functions, the signs of the times indicate and the most discerning men believe.'¹³ In Scotland, the United Free Church's Committee on Social Problems (1917) more soberly stated: 'In the immediate future there will be, in connection with many of the social problems which are before the Church and the nation, a great increase of state and municipal action . . . The war has revealed not only our want of organisation as a nation, but has shown the possibility as well as the effectiveness of government action in many directions.'¹⁴ By the early twentieth century, *laissez-faire* was finished and a new era was winning acceptance. One feature of this new era was growing acceptance of a new rôle for the state.

The Statist Politicization of the Churches

Churches were not slow to take advantage of these changing conditions in their activism on social issues, which took an increasingly statist turn. An indicator of this is how moral issues became not just political issues, but issues involving the state and its legislative powers.

10. A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation Between Law & Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914), 301.

11. See Taylor, *Laissez-faire and State Intervention*, 13–14.

12. Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire*, 5.

13. Samuel Zane Batten, *The Christian State: The State, Democracy and Christianity* (The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1909), 14.

14. United Free Church of Scotland, "Report of Committee on Social Problems," in *Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: United Free Church of Scotland, 1917), 2.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the problem of alcohol and drunkenness showed how times were changing. The Church of Scotland Commission on the [Great] War urged greater moral education through the parish system, but increasingly recognised that more than this was required. On the alcohol question, the church wrote: 'The Church of Scotland set itself a valuable precedent in its handling of the question of Intemperance, in connection with which it has not only promoted an energetic campaign in our own congregations, but has elaborated a policy for dealing with the traffic, known as the Threefold Option'.¹⁵ In promoting the Threefold Option, the Church recognised that moral education amongst its own flock would not be enough to curtail the perceived and real evils of alcohol. The Church 'has to remember that the work it has taken in hand will only be exhaustively dealt with when it persuades the State to co-operate by means of its special resources and machinery'.¹⁶ The Church's success with proposing a policy on alcohol led them to ponder 'if there are not equally strong reasons why the Church should give its mind in the same way to many kindred questions'.¹⁷ In the United States, Amendment XVIII of the United States Constitution introduced prohibition. The churches played an important rôle in this development, initially by preaching and making pronouncements in favour of prohibition, with Lyman Beecher's sermons credited with playing a decisive rôle in awakening the American churches to the need for prohibition.¹⁸ Eventually, however, the church shifted toward playing a lobbying rôle, with the first major religious lobby being established in Washington D.C. by Methodists lobbying for prohibition.¹⁹

These instances of alcohol regulation provide examples where moral problems (in this case, drunkenness) were considered by the church to require legislative attention. Not content to maintain moral standards of whatever position within their own ranks, many churches saw the law as their ally in ensuring that the moral standards of society cohere with their beliefs.²⁰ When the church held a more dominant position in society and in the lives of their parishioners, their own moral teachings could be more easily upheld through church teaching and discipline, but with increasing secularization and pluralism this approach broke down. Coming to reflect the culture around them, Christians began to share a range of moral positions with others in society, and often looked to the state to enforce what they thought was right. Such growing religious and moral pluralism encourages the statist politicization of morality when the state,

15. W. P. Paterson, "Introduction: The Ethical Mission of the Church," The Church of Scotland Commission on the War, in *Social Evils and Problems*, ed. W. P. Paterson and David Watson (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1918), 29.

16. *Ibid.*, 29.

17. *Ibid.*, 29. These questions included impurity, gambling, and crime.

18. Ernest H. Cherrington, *The Evolution of Prohibition in the United States of America* (Westerville: American Issue Press, 1920), 73–74.

19. Allen D. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington: The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 28.

20. See, for example, John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 48.

rather than a shared moral consensus, is seen as the arbiter of public morals and solver of moral questions.²¹ Here, the statist political imaginary holds the position that the problems posed by moral pluralism can be finally settled in state law because the state has the power of both legislating and enforcing law in a wide scope of areas.

Further evidence for statist politicization in the church is seen in the growth of the number of agencies that are devoted to this work of state-directed social change.²² In Washington D.C., the first major religious lobbyists were by Methodists, but the first registered lobby there were the Quakers in 1943.²³ From these humble beginnings, the number of faith-based lobbies now stands at over 200, with combined annual expenditures estimated at more than \$350 million.²⁴ While these figures show rapid growth, the more dramatic changes occurred within forms of Christianity where political action was traditionally shunned, before being adopted and promoted. Jerry Falwell provides a paradigmatic case of this. Originally opposing the mixing of faith and political action (as he saw happening in civil rights activism), he became a leading political figure through his Moral Majority, arguably transforming the relationship between American Christianity and politics in the latter half of the twentieth century.²⁵

Another manifestation of statist politicization in the church is seen in how social change is imagined to occur, with states increasingly seen as the movers of history and the agents of change. This social imaginary infiltrated the church with few being able to do public theology about society without using statist terms.²⁶ One way this is seen is in the development and ongoing practice of 'politics as statecraft,' which is the understanding of politics dominated by the state. To this way of thinking, because it is the state that designs and implements change, and gets things done, it is justified and even prudent to focus on the state as the agent of political change, and make it the target of political action.²⁷ Throughout the twentieth century, this manifested

21. Peter L. Berger, "From the Crisis of Religion to the Crisis of Secularity," in *Religion and America: Spiritual Life in a Secular Age*, ed. Mary Douglas and Steven M. Tipton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 18.

22. In the USA lobby groups in Washington D.C. have grown in number enormously, see Allen D. Hertzke, "Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, D.C." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Issues/Government/ReligiousAdvocacy_web.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2013). The United Kingdom also saw great growth in the number of Christian groups involved in politics in the twentieth century, see Francis P. McHugh, *British Churches and Public Policy: Directory of Christian Social Study/Action Groups* (Runcorn: C.I.P.A.S. 1982), viii–xi. Church lobbies, such as the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches are also active in the United Nations and European Union. But it should also be mentioned that in addition to group involvement, individual Christians may also be motivated by their faith to be involved in secular political groups, see Kenneth Medhurst and George Moyser, *Church and Politics in a Secular Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 363.

23. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington*, 28–29.

24. Hertzke, "Lobbying for the Faithful."

25. Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 20–23.

26. This feature of academic public theology is observed in Willem Fourie, "Can Public Theology Be Practised beyond the State?" *International Journal of Public Theology* 6, no. 3 (2012): 296–298.

27. Yoder thinks the church must move beyond this state-centered understanding of political change in John Howard Yoder, "Christ, the Hope of the World," in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 162–163, 171.

itself in the church trying to direct or influence the state, as seen in the growth of church lobbies. We can categorize this mode of relation to the state into two categories: the defensive mode and the assertive mode. In the defensive mode, individuals and groups seek to defend their interests against the intrusion of the state. This has been a factor in the growth of state-directed pressure groups in Great Britain.²⁸ In the USA, Allen D. Hertzke also notes that during the draft mobilization in World War II, the peace churches created a presence in Washington D.C. in order to defend their members' conscientious objector status.²⁹ In the assertive mode, on the other hand, individuals and groups in society demand services and laws from the state to further their interests.

The state's growth was partly in response to such demands of voters and lobbyists for new laws and rights. When combined with the means of the enforcing these laws, the state justified the attention of those who sought to change society through the state. It is no surprise, therefore, that political contention has increasingly concentrated on the state, as it has the power to legislate and enforce laws on an entire people. The changing nature of contention has driven many people to seek solutions to problems in the courts and in legislation, rather than through other means.³⁰ An example of this comes from the USA. Harold E. Quinley writes that during the 1960s church activists in struggles for civil rights commonly used tactics of direct action against private and public authorities. He notes that by the mid-1970s such tactics had given way to 'renewed emphasis on the use of the electoral process as a means to bring about political change.'³¹ These examples demonstrate that, with the rise of the state, the western political imagination became increasingly statist.

Concern with the Increasing Reach of the State

With widespread acceptance of more state involvement in society, and with encouragement from churches and other agencies, the state expanded in size, strength and scope. With its ever-expanding bureaucratic reach, the state has become involved in every part of life. This was a complaint of French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in his well-known jeremiad about the intrusion and brutality of the state: 'To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished.'³² But even Proudhon, as cynical about

28. David Marsh, "Introduction: Interest Groups in Britain – Their Access and Power," in *Pressure Politics: Interest Groups in Britain* (London: Junction Books, 1983), 7.

29. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington*, 29.

30. Lawrence M. Friedman, *American Law in the 20th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 568–569.

31. Harold E. Quinley, *The Prophetic Clergy: Social Activism Among Protestant Ministers* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1974), 7.

32. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Beverley Robinson (London: Freedom Press, 1923), 294.

the state as he was, would be dumbfounded by the massive expansion of the state since he penned these words in 1851. A century later, Cyril Garbett, Archbishop of York, expressed similar sentiments about 'The Great Leviathan': 'Year by year it increases its power and enters into fields until recently occupied by private enterprise and individual effort.'³³ He noted that the state expanded greatly during World War Two, and laments that the state's bureaucracy, 'through a vast army of civil servants and by a never ending spate of orders and regulations, now casts like a gigantic octopus its acquisitive tentacles into every nook and cranny of industrial, agricultural, educational, and even domestic life.'³⁴ Clearly things had changed since the *laissez-faire* of the nineteenth century.

The increase in the scope of the state can be seen in studies of specific phenomena under the control of the state. The state now takes a greater proportion of GDP than in the nineteenth century, making it much more important in terms of taxation, and even as a large employer.³⁵ The legislative and regulative output of legislators has risen, with many fields of law proliferating in the twentieth-century.³⁶

While politicians argue over public policies that will change the scope of the state, there is no real attempt to dramatically reduce its size.³⁷ But the statist nature of our political imaginary runs much deeper than this. The state has for a long time been thought of as the root of all our solutions and problems.³⁸ In other words, the rise of the state has had the effect of colonizing our lives and political imaginations to such a degree that politics is typically cast in statist terms.

Yet, while the state is undoubtedly important to modern life, some might object that it has been replaced by the market as the primary organiser of society. Susan Strange writes that, while the state still intrudes into daily life, raising scepticism about its declining power, it is the *quality* and not the *quantity* of that authority that has declined in recent years; but it is declining nonetheless.³⁹ In their book, *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that the sovereignty of nation-states has been undermined by capital, and that transnational corporations have not so much replaced the sovereignty of states, as incorporated them into their economic systems.⁴⁰ But

33. Cyril Garbett, *Church and State in England* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), 100.

34. *Ibid.*, 101.

35. Vito Tanzi and Ludger Schuknecht, *Public Spending in the 20th Century: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3–22.

36. For commentary on the American situation see Friedman, *American Law in the 20th Century*, 568–591.

37. Even an enemy of 'big government' like Margaret Thatcher oversaw a growth in the state and its power. See Phillip Blond, *Red Tory: How the Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 122, 125. Cavanaugh notes the same trend under Reagan in "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is Not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004): 257. Also see Tanzi and Schuknecht, *Public Spending in the 20th Century*, 18–20.

38. See Ruth Kenyon, "The Scope and Limits of State Initiative," in *Prospect for Christendom: Essays in Catholic Social Reconstruction*, ed. Maurice B. Reckitt (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), 189.

39. Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xii.

40. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 306–309, 325–328.

to those with opposing views, things are not so simple. Linda Weiss, for example, believes that the state is more resilient than the globalists do, finding many of their arguments weak.⁴¹

The Growth of the State and the Decline of the Church and Civil Society

The concern about the growth of state power and its reach, not only into our lives, but also our hearts and minds, is one that Milbank and Cavanaugh share with many of their predecessors in theology. From Pope Leo XIII onward, a large part of this concern has been how the growth of the modern state affects the rôle of other bodies that occupy the civil and social space.

Milbank and Cavanaugh agree that the rise of the state saw other social bodies decline. For Milbank, intermediate bodies (those sitting between the individual and the state) suffered 'reduced autonomy, or else total expiration.'⁴² Cavanaugh offers the opinion that, as the state rose in importance, it harmed civil society and undermined the basis of any associations other than the state.⁴³ Milbank and Cavanaugh share the view that the social conflict which the rise of the state created was not a conflict between the individual and the state, but between the association and the state.⁴⁴ This is because the modern state, bound together in a social contract, is created from individuals, and must draw out individuals from the associations of civil society so that they depend on the state alone. By increasing its scope and penetrating into the spheres of associations, the state does harm in two ways. First, it takes over their functions, absorbing them into the state. Second, it makes the associations dependent on the state, removing their independence. By flattening society in this way, the state makes all individuals and associations directly dependent on the state.

But Milbank and Cavanaugh also believe that the rise of state sovereignty has had a negative effect on the church. Whereas the church was previously understood to be a political body in its own right, the growth of state sovereignty left this notion in tatters. As the state pursued absolute political sovereignty, there was little political space left for an independent church. The church has too often accepted this position in society, preaching an ethic of obedience to the state alongside the notion that it is no longer a political body, but something like the soul in the body of the nation-state. Against this view, Milbank and Cavanaugh share a concern about finding a place for

41. Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State: Governing the Economy in a Global Era* (Oxford: Polity, 1998). Ellul also criticizes those who see the economic system as the fundamental structure in society. See "Needed: A New Karl Marx! (Problems of Civilization II)," in *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, ed. and trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 42–43.

42. John Milbank, "On Complex Space," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 275.

43. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 3.

44. On this view see Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom*, New critical ed (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2010), 100; Harold J. Laski, "The Pluralistic State," *The Philosophical Review* 28, no. 6 (November 1919): 564.

the church to be a political body outside the sovereignty of the state. Milbank, who draws heavily on the English pluralist tradition, wishes to reinvigorate a tradition of legal personality for all sorts of organizations, which would enable a complex space to re-emerge outside of the state. Cavanaugh's vision is more limited, wishing merely to make the church a political body, being less concerned about the rest of civil society.

At this point it is useful to clarify what is meant by the concept of 'civil society'. It is very difficult to define; its meaning has changed several times and it maintains a plurality of meaning. A contemporary and relatively neutral definition is that of Michael Banner: 'the totality of structured associations, relationships, and forms of cooperation between persons that exist in the realm between the family and the state'.⁴⁵

In the face of growing state power in the late nineteenth century, the concept of civil society came back into fashion. In his seminal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII, who based the formation of the associations of civil society in a natural human impulse, maintained that the individual's right to form associations is generally inviolable by the state and condemned the trespasses of the state into these associations.⁴⁶ Accepting the reality of these intrusions of the state, Richard Mouw writes that people have come to appreciate that, 'Only a rich associational diversity can provide a proper antidote to statism.'⁴⁷ Ernest Gellner's definition echoes this view: 'Civil Society is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society.'⁴⁸ In his essay, "Reasons for a Civil Society", Russell Hittinger traces the view that civil society has an instrumental value in checking the powers of the state.⁴⁹

In the early twentieth century, the value of intermediate associations was defended by the English pluralists G. D. H. Cole, John Neville Figgis, and H. J. Laski. Pluralism, which arose in response to the rise of the state, gave associations a central rôle in its political vision. While pluralism declined quickly into obscurity, according to the political theorist Paul Hirst, it found new relevance with the election of Margaret Thatcher and her use of a parliamentary majority to attack various organs of civil

45. Michael Banner, "Christianity and Civil Society," in *Christian Political Ethics*, ed. John A. Coleman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3.

46. Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," Vatican, May 15, 1891, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html> (accessed April 23, 2013), § 50–53.

47. Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 43.

48. Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 5.

49. Russell Hittinger, "Reasons for a Civil Society," in *Reassessing the Liberal State: Reading Maritain's Man and the State*, ed. Timothy Fuller and John P. Hittinger (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 13.

society, such as unions.⁵⁰ One aspect of this attack on unions was the legal interference in their governance after 1979, with legislation imposing new democratic and funding regulations on unions.⁵¹ This is a further example of the state's intrusion into independent associations.

Another sphere into which the state intruded was the family. The fear that the state would do so originated with the rise of the state in the late nineteenth century. In *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII wrote, 'The contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error.'⁵² Throughout the twentieth century, the family has been at the centre of debates over the rôle and scope of the state. Over time, the state has assumed several rôles which were traditionally the domain of the family. These include compulsory education (which may include, sometimes against the wishes of parents, sex education) and regulated parental discipline of children, in some places by banning "smacking".⁵³ These apparent intrusions have placed the relationship of the state to the family at the centre of the 'culture wars' in contemporary America.⁵⁴

Other observers of a growing state were the Distributists (or anti-collectivists, as they were also known), who tried to reform society based on early Catholic Social Teaching, beginning with the seminal Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII. The Distributists took a more economic angle than the Pluralists, but they shared a belief in decentralization, whether economic or political. The leading Distributists were the Catholic laymen, G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. They believed that society was facing a concentration of economic-political power, and that dispossession of people's capital would lead to a state of servility, whereby people would become wage-slaves or slaves of the state. Against these trends, they advocated political and economic localism which would protect people from the ravages of both market and state.⁵⁵ Both men are favourites of Milbank, who also cites the works of other Distributists, such as Harold J. Massingham, Vincent McNabb, and Eric Gill.⁵⁶ The Distributist

50. Paul Q. Hirst, ed., *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G. D. H. Cole, J. N. Figgis and H. J. Laski* (London: Routledge, 1989), 5–7.

51. Chris Howell, *Trade Unions and the State: The Construction of Industrial Relations Institutions in Britain, 1890–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 150–151.

52. Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," § 14.

53. For examples of these concerns in Britain see Peter W. Coman, *Catholics and the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1977), 40, 93, 97.

54. See discussion in Don S. Browning et al., *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 234–237.

55. Chesterton's main distributist works are: *What's Wrong with the World*, 5th ed. (London: Cassell, 1910); *Utopia of Usurers, and Other Essays* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1917); *The Outline of Sanity* (London: Methuen, 1926); *Do We Agree?: A Debate between G. K. Chesterton and Bernard Shaw, with Hilaire Belloc in the Chair* (Folcroft Library Editions, 1928). Belloc's main distributist works are: *The Servile State*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1977); *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (Norfolk: IHS Press, 2002); *Economics for Helen: A Brief Outline of Real Economy* (Norfolk: IHS Press, 2004).

56. H. J. Massingham, *The Tree of Life*, New (Charlbury: Jon Carpenter, 2003); Vincent McNabb, *The Church and the Land* (Norfolk: IHS Press, 2003); Eric Gill, *Art-Nonsense and Other Essays* (London: Cassell & Co. 1929); and Eric Gill, *Essays: Last Essays and In a Strange Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947).

doctrine also comes through in the work of ResPublica, with its talk of ‘ownership’ and ‘stakeholding’.⁵⁷

Following these pluralist and distributist traditions, Milbank endorses a similar instrumentalist view of civil society with the aim of reducing the power of the state. Wishing to reverse the trend of state growth, Milbank advocates the reanimation of the complex space that used to exist between the state and the citizen. By contrast, Cavanaugh remains pessimistic about the possibilities of civil society being able to free itself from the grip of the state. His reasons for thinking this are discussed further in Chapter 5. One question that confronts both Milbank and Cavanaugh then is whether their political theology is Niebuhrian, in the sense that they seek a balancing of powers as the best form of society we can expect.⁵⁸ Niebuhr thought that a balance of powers within and between societies approximated justice in the domestic and international arenas.⁵⁹ Likewise, Milbank, and other fans of *pouvoirs intermédiaires*, favour increasing the power of civil society to counter the power of the state, providing a social balance of power where the state cannot dominate the rest of society.⁶⁰ Strictly speaking, however, Milbank does not give associations an intermediate rôle between the individual and the state, but a place existing alongside the state, counterbalancing it and competing with it.

The Rise of Political Theology

Theological reflection on politics and the state has often been inspired by moments of political crisis or tension, where the available theological categories and doctrines provided no clear guidance in current conditions. In twentieth century political theology, a primary concern was the rise of the state and the correlative decline of civil society and the church as political associations. These concerns are the topic of this section, which starts by describing the growing interest in the theological study of the state, and ends with the politicization of theology, including the theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh.

57. ResPublica, “ResPublica A-Z: Celebrating two years of ResPublica,” ResPublica, November 30, 2011, <http://www.respublica.org.uk/documents/iio_ResPublica_AtoZ_final.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2013). Despite their best efforts at promoting Distributism, it has been observed that this feature of Catholic social teaching is ill-suited to British socio-economic conditions. See Coman, *Catholics and the Welfare State*, 86–92.

58. Milbank’s possible Niebuhrianism has also been questioned in Gerald W. Schlabach, “Is Milbank Niebuhrian Despite Himself?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 23, no. 2 (2005): 33–40.

59. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 243–248; *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Volume II: Human Destiny* (London: Nisbet, 1943), 267–279; *Christianity and Power Politics* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1969), 26–27.

60. This is a prominent motif in Red Toryism. See Blond, *Red Tory*, 63, 72.

The Theological Reaction to the State

The rise of the modern state in the twentieth century seemingly caught the church without the doctrinal resources to understand this phenomenon. Writing for the Church of Scotland inquiry into the Christian response to war and peace, Edward T. Vernon attributed the churches' silence on the rise of the state to its lack of a doctrine of the state.⁶¹ His comment is intriguing because it incorrectly implies that the church had no resources at that time to confront these transgressions of the civil authorities.

The theological resources that clearly existed were brought to bear on this issue in the inter-war period, which saw an outpouring of critical reflection on the state. Ellul, for instance, dates the beginnings of his critique of the state, which he sustained throughout his career, from the crisis of the 1930s.⁶² Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Brunner were also writing on the state during that time. The seminal ecumenical conferences of the early- to mid-twentieth century were landmark occasions for considering the church's relationship to the state in times of crisis. The 1930s saw a range of ecumenical conferences leading to the most important: the Oxford Conference of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work (Oxford, 1937).⁶³ The totalitarian direction of the state was central to its deliberations.⁶⁴ In a volume related to the conference, ecumenist Samuel McCrea Cavert wrote that the rise of the state corresponded with an 'epoch-making expansion of religion's sense of responsibility for the whole social and economic and political order.'⁶⁵ This is no coincidence or contradiction, since the rise of the state was condemned at the same time as it influenced the churches' changing perceptions of its rôle in society.

The ecumenical World Conference of Christian Youth (Amsterdam, 1939) also had a theme on the nation and state, noting that 'the democratic states are increasingly tending towards a far-reaching control of all the main aspects of human life.'⁶⁶ The Conference's preparatory volumes and reports also examined the rôle of the state in family life, education, and racial issues. Following World War II, the inaugural

61. Edward T. Vernon, "Some Notes Towards a Christian Philosophy of the State," in *The Church's Attitude to Peace and War: The Question of Peace and War in the Light of Christ's Teaching and the Practical Means Whereby the Church May Lead the Nation in the Way of Peace* (London: SCM Press, 1937), 74.

62. Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenot, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology, and Politics*, trans. Joan Mendès France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 87–88.

63. 'The Conception and Preparation of the Conference' in J. H. Oldham, ed., *The Churches Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community, and State* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), 14–18.

64. Rejecting any simple 'politicized' interpretation of this conference, Graeme Smith argues that Oxford 1937 can also be considered a missionary conference, and not simply a 'political' one. *Oxford 1937: The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 25–46.

65. Samuel McCrea Cavert, "Points of Tension between Church and State in America Today," in *Church and State in the Modern World*, by Henry Pitney Van Dusen et al. (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 163.

66. World Conference of Christian Youth, *Further Studies on the Christian Community in the Modern World: Second Preparatory Study Outline for the World Conference of Christian Youth, Amsterdam, Holland, July 24–August 2, 1939* (Geneva: Conference Headquarters, 1939), 14.

Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Amsterdam, 1948) had the theme, 'Man's Disorder and God's Design', with a strong political focus, including reflections on the rise of the state. The participants, who included Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, and John C. Bennett, concluded that two main tendencies contributed to the current world situation (although reports only covered Asia, the USA, and Europe). These were, 'the vast concentrations of power' in both economic and political forms, and the influence of 'technics'.⁶⁷ A special concern at the Assembly was totalitarian states. Brunner provided this statement of how the adjective 'totalitarian' was being used at that time:

The danger of totalitarianism would not be so overwhelming, if it were merely a matter of political dictatorship as opposed to democratic forms of government. Totalitarianism is something more pernicious than dictatorship. It is the attempt to direct and mould the entire life of the community and of its individual members in accordance with the dictates of an omniscient state machine, using for this purpose all the powerful methods of mass-suggestion and police control provided by modern technics. The disquieting feature of our situation is that totalitarianism—in the sense indicated—is in the ascendency everywhere, even in those countries which are regarded as traditionally democratic.⁶⁸

By the mid-twentieth century, many church leaders and theologians agreed that the state had grown in scope to dangerous levels, and had concentrated power into its own hands at the expense of individuals and intermediary organisations. As Maurice Reckitt noted, the totalitarian state 'regards its authority as the sole source of all others'.⁶⁹ But it was not always clear why the churches were so concerned with the rise of the state.⁷⁰ Some have argued that Christianity is also totalitarian and merely objects to the totalitarianism of the state because of its pagan ideology.⁷¹

The World Conference on Church and Society (Geneva, 1966) was another landmark ecumenical forum. But while the state was once again a major topic of discussion, its large size was no longer at issue. To the contrary, the report reads: 'The nation-state is too small for a technological age, unless it enters into international economic and political cooperation.'⁷² Some delegates wanted to permit their states

67. World Council of Churches, "Report of Section III: The Church and the Disorder of Society," in *The Church and the Disorder of Society* (London: SCM Press, 1948), 198.

68. Emil Brunner, "And Now?" in *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, by World Council of Churches (London: SCM Press, 1948), 176–177.

69. Maurice B. Reckitt, "Religion and Politics," in *Faith that Illuminates*, ed. V. A. Demant (London: Centenary Press, 1935), 134.

70. As Paul Tillich wrote, 'The Christian churches have no inherent reason for resisting national concentration in itself.' Paul Tillich, "The Totalitarian State and the Claims of Church," *Social Research* 1, no. 4 (1934): 435. Milbank and Cavanaugh would answer Tillich, as will seen, on the basis of ecclesiology and what this state does to associations.

71. See Smith, *Oxford 1937*, 130–133.

72. M. M. Thomas and Paul Albrecht, *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time: World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, July 12–26, 1966: The Official Report with a Description of the Conference* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), 99.

a 'more encompassing role' in countering individualism and building nationhood for social justice.⁷³ But the need to control the power of the state was also keenly felt. For some, this could be done from above, through international law, some form of world government, or a strengthened United Nations. For others, it was best controlled from below through civil society. Control of recalcitrant states could also be exerted horizontally by other states.

These theologians, churches, and conferences, in reflecting on the state, not only identified the dangers of the state's increased power, but also the opportunities to remedy great social evils using this power. The church, perhaps without realizing what it was doing (and continues to do), justified further increasing state power through arguments for state amelioration of social ills. But the church was slow to recognize the dangerous dilemma in advocating greater state powers, which political philosopher Crispin Sartwell expresses in this fashion:

State power is the necessary condition of social justice, but it is also the greatest single threat to social justice . . . When you constitute a state with sufficient power to achieve a just distribution of goods, you constitute a power with the ability and, admit it, the tendency to commit countless unjust acts, or for that matter with the power and the tendency to impose radically unjust distribution of goods.⁷⁴

The church's social witness continues to play out this dilemma, with some branches of the church decrying the state intrusion into family life and the lives of individuals, while others in the church simultaneously endorse welfare programmes that, in order to be affordable, have to be targeted at those with needs that must be assessed and monitored. In these and other ways, the church (along with other agencies in civil society) indirectly encourages state growth, and supports the means of state enforcement of laws. Over the decades, these piecemeal policy actions, often lobbied for with the best of intentions, have led to an enlarged state. According to Sartwell, we should not be surprised when the state uses its power for social justice for social injustice, because this characterizes the state.⁷⁵ Naively, the church often thinks that the state's increased power will be used primarily for good; rarely acknowledged is that the state is beholden to sin, and that increased power can, and probably will be, used to advance other interests.⁷⁶

Milbank and Cavanaugh would not only sympathize with Sartwell's view and reject the intrusion of the state, but would also reject the state on the basis of its violent means. Other theologians, on the other hand, would accept these means as enacting

73. Thomas and Albrecht, *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time*, 98, 106–107.

74. Sartwell, *Against the State*, 82. Also see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Contemporary Christian Views of the State: Some Major Issues," *Christian Scholar's Review* 3, no. 4 (1974): 322.

75. Sartwell, *Against the State*, 76.

76. See Jeong Kii Min, *Sin and Politics: Issues in Reformed Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 69–97.

justifiable force. Hannah Arendt is a useful guide here in differentiating the two. In *Macht und Gewalt* (revealingly translated as *On Violence*), she writes: 'It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among such key words as "power," "strength," "force," "authority," and, finally "violence"—all of which refer to distinct, different phenomena and would hardly exist unless they did.'⁷⁷ The fortunes of these terms and their use in political theology reveals much about who uses them. Joseph Ratzinger observed that among liberation theologians, force on behalf of the state in the service of law and order was described as oppressive, while force directed toward freedom was described positively.⁷⁸ Taking a very different position, Yoder noted that to use the word 'force' for the legitimate violence of the state was 'obfuscation', with honesty requiring it be called violence, with violence only being legitimized by it being less objectionable than the alternative injustice.⁷⁹ If one follows the path taken by Yoder, it becomes much easier to portray the state as profane, as both Milbank and Cavanaugh do in calling the force the state uses to maintain order and peace 'violence'. Arendt comments on such logic, saying that, 'to equate political power with the "organization of violence" makes sense only if one follows Marx's estimate of the state as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling class.'⁸⁰

Despite these conflicts over the means of the state, the mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of a broad consensus on the rôle of the state within church and society. Between the 1960s and 1980s, both theology and political science neglected the *concept* of the state, with studies of the state dropping out of favour.⁸¹ So while people debated the rôle of the state, public policy, and what the state should be doing, little was being done on thinking about state *qua* state. Eventually, however, this consensus fractured. In 1974, Nicholas Wolterstorff observed that, while previously one could predict what each mainline Christian tradition would say about the state, this 'familiar stalemate' or 'comfortable equilibrium' between the competing views of Catholics, reformed Lutheran and others was now upset. He claimed two reasons for this disturbance. First, the trust the church had in the state to work for the good and punish the evil doer was shaken by the events of the twentieth century from the First World War to the Vietnam War. Second, this historical experience was combined with emerging theological and exegetical work into the principalities and powers in Scripture (examples include Ephesians 3:10 and Colossians 1:16). Consequently

77. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: A Harvest/HBJ book, 1970), 43.

78. Joseph Ratzinger, "Freedom and Liberation: The Anthropological Vision of the Instruction *Libertatis conscientia*," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 242–243.

79. John Howard Yoder, "A Theological Critique of Violence," in *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Harold Stassen, Mark Nation, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 36.

80. Arendt, *On Violence*, 36.

81. See William E. Connolly, *Appearance and Reality in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 120–121.

powers theology seemed central to a biblical understanding of our reality, meaning texts like Romans 13 could no longer be read as a straightforward justification of the civil authorities.⁸² Another factor which may have been influential in renewing interest in state studies was the shattering of the mid-twentieth century political consensus around 1980, with the election of Thatcher and Reagan, and the global rise of the New Right.⁸³

The Radical Orthodox theologian, Daniel Bell, has more recently noted the development of a tradition of political theology moving away from the ‘dominant tradition’, characterized by being captured by the *mythos* of the state. In this mainstream consensus, the state and civil society are heralded as agents of freedom, while the church is shorn of a concrete political presence in favour of an apolitical – or, at most, only abstractly and generally political – presence as a custodian of values.⁸⁴ Against this, Bell describes and endorses what he calls the ‘emergent tradition’ of contemporary political theology. He identifies this with postliberal theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, and Oliver O’Donovan; and one could add himself and Cavanaugh. To Bell, this ‘emergent tradition rejects politics as statecraft and envisions the church as a concrete public, political space in its own right.’⁸⁵ Bell provides a good example of the dualistic nature of these opposing of traditions. He concludes with the question, ‘Leviathan or the Body of Christ?’⁸⁶ Despite attempting to overcome dualisms, Cavanaugh also suggests that it is either the church, *or* the state. We either endorse statecraft, *or* we do not.

To summarize this section, we might pose the following question: What explains this breakdown in the theological consensus and the rise of this alternative anti-statist tradition? The rejection of the church’s mainstream statist politics appears to witness to dissatisfaction with how Christian politics has developed in response to the political and economic developments of the last thirty years. As discussed throughout this thesis, the church’s response in the United Kingdom and the USA to the rise of the New Right agenda of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan was weak, and the church’s political thinking failed to keep pace with these political developments. The following section examines in more detail the politicization of Christian theology and practice in the church, and the reactions against this.

The Politicization of Christian Praxis and Theology

With the churches and their theologians studying the rise of the state, and warning against its deeper and broader intrusion into human lives, one may have expected

82. Wolterstorff, “Contemporary Christian Views of the State,” 311–312.

83. Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

84. Bell, “State and Civil Society,” 428–429.

85. *Ibid.*, 433.

86. *Ibid.*, 437.

that they would have heeded these warnings, and tried to insulate themselves against such tendencies. But instead, as this section will show, the churches became more politicized in line with this broad cultural trend. Even those theologians, such as Milbank and Cavanaugh, who most decry the rise and persistence of the modern, totalitarian state, have not escaped its politicizing influence. In making their theology – and, particularly in their case, their ecclesiology and sacramental theology – political, their theology remains beholden to this modern tendency.

The tension between the church and the rise of the modern state has resulted in two primary forms of politicized theology. The first, and statist form, exists within mainstream theology (Bell's 'dominant tradition'), which is happy to engage in politics as statecraft.⁸⁷ This tradition recognises the legitimacy of statist politics and the state itself, provided the state seeks legitimacy through the provision of justice and peace, seeking these things largely through the state alone. Where this position falls short, however, is in not truly appreciating the dominance of the state. It accepts things the way they are, and is willing to work within the given structures of society. For holders of this position, Marx's analysis rings wholly true:

The more powerful the state, and therefore the more *political* a country is, the less inclined it is to seek the basis of *social* ills and to grasp their *general* principle in the *principle of the state*, and thus in the *present structure of society*, the active, self-conscious and official expression of which is the state.⁸⁸

As Marx points out, when the state grows in power, and society becomes increasingly politicized, the state fades into the background and becomes more or less invisible. This explains how, in a politicized society, the church and the theologian came to render social criticism political within the imagination of the state, while hardly criticizing the state itself. But, notwithstanding their criticisms of this first form of politicized theology, Milbank and Cavanaugh are captives of the second, which we turn to now.

This second form of politicized theology is the opposite of the first. It recognizes the theological compromises of statist politicization and finds, to the contrary, the true politics within the church. Preferring to politicize doctrines and Christian practice than admit to legitimate politics outside the church, it remains, nevertheless, a theological accommodation to the politicization of society. This form of politicized theology goes beyond merely accepting the political implications of faith, it elevates politics into the position of being the standard by which faith is understood, transforming, in this process Christianity into a political movement that opposes the state.

87. Bell, "State and Civil Society," 428–433.

88. Karl Marx, "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian'," in *Marx: Early Political Writings*, ed. Joseph O'Malley and Richard A. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107. Marx's italics.

Politicization of the church has often been associated with liberation theology and is often cast in a negative light, but it is more widespread than that, appearing in most Western nations and confessions, and paying little heed to one's political orientation.⁸⁹ There is plenty of evidence for these varieties of contemporary politicization given in the pages that follow. Evidence for the statist politicization of Christianity also exists in how those who retreat from political involvement are viewed. They are sometimes called reactionaries or pietists, and thought of as sectarian, heretical, irresponsible, deviant, irrelevant, and lacking a modern missiology. In the mind of their critics, they fail to understand that Christianity *is* political and *must* engage with the state.⁹⁰

Politicized Christianity has attracted several critics.⁹¹ One of the most prominent was Edward Norman, who famously criticized the politically active church in his 1978 Reith Lectures.⁹² To Norman, the 'politicization of religion' is 'the internal transformation of the faith itself, so that it comes to be defined in terms of political values.'⁹³ His critique was that the church had got involved in political action in an uncritical way.⁹⁴ In making these charges against the church, he provoked a vigorous reaction, both in its opposition to him, and in favour of a political church.⁹⁵

John Howard Yoder also criticized the politicization of the church in its 'Constantinianism', in which the church alters its theology to accommodate the ruler and their realist ethics of government within its midst.⁹⁶ Yoder argued that since the conversion of Constantine, most churches have been unable to resist the temptation of Constantinianism, falling into an inauthentic Christianity. His main project was to reveal this as a heresy, and create an ecclesologically sound basis for Christians witnessing to the state while maintaining the purity of the church. Yoder, in writing of the 'fall of the church' in its marriage with Roman and other powers, noted several objections to this accommodation.⁹⁷ This fall meant that Christians tried to control and direct the state, and they succeeded to a large degree, making the 'Christianization of politics' the flip side of the 'politicization of Christianity'. Successive waves of Constantinianism have plagued the church, making its relationship with the state

89. A strident criticism of politicization in liberation theology is found in Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'."

90. For a discussion of these points, see Philip D. Kenneson, *Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 48–53.

91. For one survey see Duncan B. Forrester, *Theology and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 43–56.

92. Published as E. R. Norman, *Christianity and the World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

93. *Ibid.*, 2.

94. This view was also expressed in Rachel Tingle, *Another Gospel?: An account of the growing involvement of the Anglican Church in secular politics*, with a foreword by Tony Higon (London: Christian Studies Centre, 1988).

95. See, for instance, Charles Elliott et al., *Christian Faith and Political Hopes: A Reply to E. R. Norman* (London: Epworth Press, 1979); Dorothee Sölle, Peter L. Berger, and Roger L. Shinn, "Continuing the Discussion: 'A Politicized Christ'," *Christianity and Crisis* 39, no. 4 (March 19 1979): 50–57.

96. John Howard Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135–147.

97. John Howard Yoder, "The Racial Revolution in Theological Perspective," in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 103.

problematic. But, again, in rejecting one form of politicization, Yoder adopted it in a different guise, politicizing the ministry of Jesus and the practices of the church.⁹⁸

The criticisms by Norman and others of the politicization of Christian faith remain relevant as a guide to the temptations faced by churches in the first form of politicization. But more recent critics of the first form of politicization have become susceptible to fall into the second form of politicization. This form of politicization of Christianity finds a critic in James Davison Hunter, who identifies a tendency in Yoder, Hauerwas, and Cavanaugh to politicize their theology so that the 'dominant language and thus the primary frame of reference' is politics.⁹⁹ Beyond these 'neo-Anabaptists', as Hunter calls them, there are plentiful examples of the politicization of Christianity in almost all areas of Christian theology and praxis: in doctrine, the practices of the church, and the interpretation and application of Scripture.

Many Christian doctrines have been politicized. Chapters 3 to 5 that follow are devoted to the political understanding of the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption. Other writers have looked at providence in a more general sense.¹⁰⁰ The doctrine of the Trinity has been a popular locus for political reflection, such as found in social trinitarianism.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, political theories have been developed from focussing on each individual person of the trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit). Patriarchal politics has not fared well in the wake of feminism, now existing as a fringe movement among Christian Reconstructionists, Theonomists, and Complementarians.¹⁰² More popular is the quest for the political Jesus, which comes with the risk that Jesus is reduced to a political figure. Many authors have tackled this topic, but from reading them, it appears that each author finds the Jesus they are looking for.¹⁰³ The Holy Spirit is another popular source of political inspiration.¹⁰⁴ A further doctrine held

98. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992).

99. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 162.

100. For examples, see Scott Bader-Saye, "Figuring Time: Providence and Politics," in *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption*, ed. Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold (Grand Rapids: SCM Press, 2006), 91–111; and various essays in Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler, eds., *The Providence of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

101. For criticisms of social trinitarianism see Paul Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine: Toward an (Im)political Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

102. Patriarchy's high point was in Robert Filmer, but his influence suffered greatly following John Locke's devastating criticisms. See Sir Robert Filmer, "Patriarcha," in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–68; and John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

103. See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*; John Howard Yoder, "Jesus: A Model of Radical Political Action," in *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Harold Stassen, Mark Nanton, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 77–82; Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

104. See D. Robert Kennedy, *The Politics of the Spirit: Understanding the Holy Spirit in the Community Called Church* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996); Reinhard Hütter, "The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit," *Pro Ecclesia* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 334–361; Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

to have political implications is the atonement.¹⁰⁵ Despite being largely sidelined in modern theology, the doctrine of ascension has been called a ‘public truth’.¹⁰⁶ The creeds and confessions of the Christian church have often contained overt political statements, making political theology intrinsic to how numerous denominations understand their particular identity.¹⁰⁷

Political interpretations are now also commonly given to many Christian practices. Liturgy and worship have become central to Christian politics, with each component of liturgy bearing its own political load.¹⁰⁸ Both Barth and Bonhoeffer, for instance, wrote on the political dimension of preaching.¹⁰⁹ Praying has been described as ‘the most political act any Christian can engage in.’¹¹⁰ Church music, whether traditional hymns or Negro spirituals, is claimed to have a political element.¹¹¹ There is also a politics of forgiveness and absolution.¹¹² The sacraments remain a particularly fruitful area of ecclesial politics. Baptism, widely seen as initiation into a new community, has, for many, political importance.¹¹³ The politics of the Eucharist have been a special focus of Cavanaugh.¹¹⁴ Christian virtues have also been marshalled into Christian politics, with Milbank believing that ‘political hope can only now be sustained through a practice of the theological virtues.’¹¹⁵ Others have made political

105. Theodore W. Jennings, *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

106. Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

107. On the politics of the creeds see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 216–244.

108. For a broad overview of this see Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003). For worship see Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*.

109. Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, ed. Will Herberg (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 185; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “What Is Church?” in *Berlin, 1932–1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 265. Also see Stanley Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers, and Sundries* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 9.

110. Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 281. Also see Johannes Baptist Metz and Karl Rahner, *The Courage to Pray*, trans. Sarah O’Brien Twohig (London: Burns & Oates, 1980).

111. Rochelle A. Stackhouse, “Hymnody and Politics: Isaac Watts’s “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” and Timothy Dwight’s “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord,” in *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology*, ed. Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 42–66.

112. See John Milbank, “Forgiveness: The double waters,” in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 44–60; L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Nigel Biggar, “Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Possibility of Forgiveness,” in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power*, ed. Richard Harries and Stephen Platten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141–153.

113. See Gerhard Van den Heever, “Making body politic: the rhetoric of early Christian baptismal discourse,” *Scriptura*, no. 90 (2005): 709–721; Yoder, *Body Politics*; Debra Dean Murphy, “Identity Politics: Christian Baptism and the Pledge of Allegiance,” *Liturgy* 20, no. 1 (2005): 5–10.

114. Cavanaugh’s primary work on this is *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); also see Yoder, *Body Politics*.

115. John Milbank, “On Theological Transgression,” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 172.

capital out of hospitality.¹¹⁶ Christian witnessing, which can result in martyrdom, is, Tripp York informs us, a political act.¹¹⁷

In relation to the Bible, Brueggemann warned of its politicization, whereby ‘everything is read as a mandate to social action and social transformation with reference to urgent contemporary issues.’¹¹⁸ Contemporary biblical scholarship and political philosophy have also generated an abundance of books on the politics of scripture.¹¹⁹ This focus is not restricted to Christian theologians; philosophers have also been drawn to St Paul for his political importance.¹²⁰ But while Paul has become for many the focal point for a Christian politics of anti-imperialism, there are several sceptics about these political readings of Paul.¹²¹

A materialist explanation for this politicization of Christianity was given above (in relating the rise of the state to the culture of politicization). Ellul gives further theological reasons for Christianity’s politicization in his study of the ‘Causes of the Political Transformation’ of the church.¹²² Ellul does not think these are all bad; to a degree they are welcome in order to bring Christians up to a more appropriate level of political awareness and action. For instance, he values the growing recognition that Christians are to be loyal to God’s will and acknowledge the Lordship of God over all things. Another is that Christianity cannot be confined to Sunday alone, but must infiltrate all of life. Ellul also observes a growing sense of responsibility toward the world. This implies that we must meet people where they are, and be present on behalf of others, including in the political realm. Ellul also mentions the ‘Barmen Complex’, whereby statements are made in the style of the Barmen Declaration on all issues, with profound theology and great urgency. Further, there is the belief that all is settled on the level of politics. Finally, from his French context, he mentions ‘Sartrean existentialism’, with its ethos of involvement and criticism. Elsewhere Ellul addresses the more sociological side of the politicization of the church as an accommodation to

116. See Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), 72; Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

117. Tripp York, *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2007).

118. Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, 19.

119. The general trend is observed in Adam Kotsko, *The Politics of Redemption: The Social Logic of Salvation* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 62. Recent examples include Bauckham, *Bible in Politics*; J. Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis–Kings* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); Walzer, *In God’s Shadow*.

120. See John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff, *St. Paul among the Philosophers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

121. Criticisms of the politicization of Paul include Ron Cassidy, “The Politicization of Paul: Romans 13:1–7 in Recent Discussion,” *Expository Times* 121, no. 8 (May 2010): 383–389; and, Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

122. Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 100–109.

the prevailing intellectual culture. Ellul sums up the political spirit of the times in this fashion:

Everything is political. Politics is the only serious activity. The fate of humanity depends on politics, and classic philosophical or religious truth takes on meaning only as it is incarnated in political action. Christians are typical in this connection. They rush to the defense of political religion, and assert that Christianity is meaningful only in terms of political commitment. In truth, it is their religious mentality which plays this trick on them. As Christianity collapses as a religion, they look about them in bewilderment, unconsciously of course, hoping to discover where the religious is to be incarnated in their time. Since they are religious, they are drawn automatically into the political sphere like iron filings to a magnet.¹²³

Here Ellul describes how Christians are attracted to the political spirit of the times, supporting Bonhoeffer's contention that Christians have sacralized politics, finding in the political order a 'religious significance'.¹²⁴ It should be noted, however, that Ellul's exaggerated claim – that 'politics is the only serious activity' – is contradicted by the other activities that Christians reverentially undertake (such as worship). Nevertheless, Ellul rightly points to the great importance of politics to many contemporary Christians, as witnessed in the state-directed politics of their church agencies, and also in their adoption of a non-statist theopolitical imagination. As will become apparent throughout this study, it is clear that while some theologians shun statist politics, they remain at pains to show that their ecclesiology, worship, or liturgy, are nevertheless 'political' in order to demonstrate how the church is relevant to society. Strong cultural and intellectual forces make this a great theological temptation. In the words of Theodor Adorno, 'Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed; every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular, the profane.'¹²⁵

Milbank and Cavanaugh, along with Bell, Hauerwas, and Yoder, wish the church to be the site of politics. Why is the allure of politics so powerful? Are they catering to a need for the church to be seen to be relevant in not giving up on politics? While it is difficult to deny that Christianity is political (two central claims of Christianity have been claimed as political: the confession that 'Jesus is Lord'¹²⁶, and the affirmation that 'Jesus has been raised from the dead'¹²⁷), modern theology

123. Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975), 199.

124. See Bonhoeffer quote on page 18.

125. Theodor W. Adorno, "Reason and Revelation," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 136.

126. J. G. Davies, *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 48; David Lochhead, *The Liberation of the Bible*, Revised, ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley (Maryknoll / London: Orbis Books / SPCK, 1993), 139.

127. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 730.

sometimes goes beyond this justified interest in the political implications of faith to politicize Christian doctrines and practices. Milbank has stated his disavowal of such a 'political theology': 'only a thoroughly craven theology would imagine that its task is therefore to translate the Gospel message into "political" terms.'¹²⁸ The key word here is 'translate', with Milbank rejecting attempts to translate the message of Christianity into terms secular politics can readily understand. But this does not mean that he thinks the church and its teaching are non-political.

Suggesting that twentieth-century theology became politicized implies that there is a non-politicized form of theology. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between 'faithful political Christianity' and a 'politicized Christianity'. In explaining the difference between them, it is useful to consider the difference between orthodoxy and heresy. If heresy results from overemphasising a good in theological thought (too much emphasis on either the divinity or humanity of Christ, for instance), then it is difficult to say where this line is crossed in strictly definitional terms.¹²⁹ So, while faithful Christianity can be described as inherently political, it does not begin or end with the political relevance of the gospel, or become reduced to its political importance. As described above, to cross over into politicized Christianity is to elevate the political importance of faith over and above other theological meanings of the Christian faith.

How theology can be political without being politicized can be illustrated by an example from Barth. In writing to American Christians in 1943 on the topic of the proclamation of the Word of God, he urged that preachers should not preach on the topic of the war, for this merely duplicates the rôle of newspapers and the propaganda organs of the state. Instead he suggests that preachers preach, 'The Word of the reconciliation of the world with God through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17–21) and nothing else.'¹³⁰ Preaching this in all its fullness, according to Barth, means preaching about 'the sole sovereignty of Jesus Christ, His human origin among the people of Israel, His triumph over powers and dominations, about God's mercy and patience revealed in Him, the dual benefaction of Church and State realized in Him; about the impossibility of serving two masters, about freedom, and the service of the children of God conceived in the Holy Spirit'. By preaching this message, Barth believes that they are

inevitably preaching . . . against Hitler, Mussolini and Japan; against anti-Semitism, idolization of the State, oppressive and intimidating methods, militarism, against all the lies and the injustice of National Socialism and

128. John Milbank, "The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2006): 246–247.

129. This aspect of heresy is taken from David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.

130. Karl Barth, *The Church and the War*, trans. Antonia H. Froendt, with an introduction by Samuel McCrea Cavert (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 30.

Fascism in its European and its Asiatic forms, and thus they will naturally (and without “dragging politics into the pulpit”) speak on behalf of the righteous state and also for an honestly determined conduct of the war.¹³¹

The lesson to be learned from Barth here is this: theology can be political without being politicized. If we take the criterion for politicized theology seriously, we should not start with politics and shape Christian proclamation to the realities of the world. Instead, as Barth suggests, the Word will speak directly to these realities when we preach the Gospel.

To be clear: the argument here does not advocate apoliticism or suggest that Christianity has no relationship to politics. The final chapter will be partially a defence of a political Christianity through the advocacy of a desacralized view of the state that does not profane Christians who engage with it. The focus throughout is on the modern theological temptation of the politicization of faith as a critical tool to understand the theologies of Radical Orthodoxy and their appeal in the contemporary world.

Beyond Politics as Statecraft to Radical Orthodoxy

The rise of the modern state did not convert everyone to statist political theology. Among those reacting strongly to this common view is the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy, founded by John Milbank and others. In the seminal essay on Radical Orthodoxy, co-authors Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward outline the core of their thinking. Radical Orthodoxy is ‘radical’ in that it is a ‘return to patristic and medieval roots’, using this tradition to critique modernity with ‘an unprecedented boldness’. In doing so, Radical Orthodoxy rethinks the traditions of thought of secular modernity which seeks explanation in immanence alone, and advocates instead transcendence as the only ground of truth.¹³² ‘The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is “participation”, as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God.’¹³³ All disciplines, including politics, must be ‘framed’ theologically, ‘otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing.’¹³⁴ Cavanaugh contributed an essay to this same moment-making volume¹³⁵, but would be less inclined than Milbank to see himself as part of a theological movement.

131. Barth, *Church and the War*, 31.

132. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, “Introduction: Suspending the material: the turn of radical orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (London: Blackwell, 1999), 2–3.

133. *Ibid.*, 3.

134. *Ibid.*, 3.

135. Cavanaugh, “The City.”

Within Radical Orthodoxy, there are several writers with an identifiable political focus. They include Daniel M. Bell, Jr., William Cavanaugh, D. Stephen Long, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward. While there are differences between their views, together they form a cluster of theologians who have countered many traditional understandings of the state and politics. These theologians speak into the present political chaos with confidence and plausibility rarely seen from theologians in this generation. Part of their project is contesting the concept of the state. They go further than this in also contesting the meaning of 'politics' itself. This becomes another way in which the movement is itself political – contesting a political concept is not merely a scholarly practice, it is an inherently political act.¹³⁶ At stake is the true locus of politics, which to them is much more than statecraft. The state is not the true locale of politics; true politics is found in the church. But not any church; the true politics must be found, by definition, in the true church. There are churches that have fallen from the true church through compromises with Constantinianism and other accommodations to culture. More discussion on how Milbank and Cavanaugh perceive the church will follow in later chapters. Another prominent ethicist related to this movement is Stanley Hauerwas, who taught Bell, Long, and Cavanaugh, and through his own writings has questioned the way the modern liberal nation-state has influenced the church and its mission.¹³⁷

Milbank and Cavanaugh do not reject politics but translocate it into the church, although they differ as to the extent to which they do this. It could be asked whether we are any better off bringing the political into the church, rather than taking the church into the political. This is because the church is political in a different way to the so-called politics of the state. To Milbank and Cavanaugh, the state is created in, sustained through, and redeemed by violence. Relocating politics to the church allows one to be political without being violent or supporting violence. But some might be dissatisfied with this. Is politics in the church really a true politics? Of course, having redefined the meaning of 'politics' means that anyone who does not adopt one's new definition becomes beholden not only to the false politics of statecraft, but false theology as well. Both Milbank and Cavanaugh emphasize that it is the church as the body of Christ which offers a true politics. The formation and sustenance of this body politic is the political problem that they both address through seeing the church as the body of Christ, formed in the Eucharist, as the body politic. Milbank writes, 'Political theory and ecclesiology must finally then be of one piece.'¹³⁸ As the following chapters show, Milbank and Cavanaugh are right to question how the state

136. See discussion in Clyde Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State: Marxist, Neo-Marxist, Post-Marxist* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 10–11.

137. Hauerwas's influence on Radical Orthodoxy is acknowledged in John Milbank, Simon Oliver, and Rupert Shortt, "Radical Orthodoxy," in *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, by Rupert Shortt (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), 112.

138. Milbank, "Preface," xv.

has been sanctified. But the following discussion also shows that the state can be desacralized and is not as profane as Milbank and Cavanaugh would have us believe.

In many ways, Milbank and Cavanaugh are not simply political theologians, but theologians of political economy. This is witnessed to by the scope of their work, which stretches well beyond the state or justice, but covers the secular underpinnings of modern political economy and the state. This thesis cannot do justice to all this work, but is primarily concerned with the appropriate theological standpoint on the state. Milbank's project is an attempt to go beyond the nihilism of capitalism and political liberalism, and promote a form of Christian socialism. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, is at pains to make the church a political society in its own right, and one that will have the effect of undermining statist capitalism.

Some differences between Milbank and Cavanaugh will be apparent throughout this work. One difference is how directly the church is an agent of social change in society. For Milbank, the church maintains a rôle as an agent of social change in a more direct rôle than for Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh's church, as the locale for politics in his theology, indirectly influences society and the secular, while for Milbank the church tries directly to influence things. Milbank wishes to return to a time when the church and Christianity still shapes society.

Conclusions

From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the rise of the state in both the USA and UK led to increased politicization. Initially, this politicization took primarily a statist form, as witnessed in state-centered political action by church and civil society, as they defended themselves against enlarged state intrusion, and took to advancing moral, political, and economic agendas through the state. The churches and their theologians followed this general cultural trend by becoming politicized in statist forms, as seen in their adoption of statist methods of social change. Curiously, at the same time, the intrusion of the state into family life and independent associations was condemned by theologians. This scepticism about the state, however, led some theologians to reject the politics of statecraft, and sought the true Christian politics in the church and its practices. This has led to the politicization of Christianity, but in an anti-statist mode.

In this way, the political theologies of both Milbank and Cavanaugh constitute reactions against the statist politicization of theology. Since they believe the state to be profane, and something that Christians should shun, they prefer that politics be located in the church. Yet, in wanting the church to remain political, their ecclesiologies become politicized. Keeping the perspective of Bonhoeffer in mind, they reject the sacral nature of the state, and have rebelled against the existing order. The

following chapters provide more detail on why Milbank and Cavanaugh believe the state to be profane and why they think the political church makes sense.

Chapter 3

Creation and the Origin of the State

Once, there was no 'state'. While for some this may seem an obvious statement, there are many scholars who disagree, using the word 'state' to describe any system of political organisation.¹ However, those who believe that the state has a beginning often disagree over what the state is, and when, and how, the state came into existence. This chapter discusses several answers to the question of the origins of the state, in particular those of John Milbank and William Cavanaugh.

This chapter is the first of three that will place a doctrine – here, creation – in relation to the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh. The purpose of these chapters will be to examine the work of God in the world of politics through the theological themes of creation, preservation, and redemption. While these works of God are not entirely distinct, by necessity they will be covered in three separate chapters. God's relationship to the state can be viewed through these doctrinal lenses. 'Creation' is not being used here in a technical sense alone, but also in the sense of the origins.

Where God is seen to be directly ordering the state through creation, preservation, or redemption, the state can become considered sacred. Where God is seen as separated from the state altogether it can become viewed as profane. Outside of theology, sacred/profane judgments of the state can also be made. The autonomous secular state can be claimed to be God-like as a creator, preserver or redeemer of society. Of these three chapters, this is the odd one out because, as will become apparent, there is a sense in which the autonomous state can more easily claim to be a preserver or redeemer of human society than it can to be a creator of humans or of society. If so, making the case that the state is a creator in the place of God is more difficult than in the other two instances. Yet, in the relationship between the state,

1. This was the view of the German Catholic priest and cultural anthropologist Wilhelm Koppers, see Lawrence Krader, "The Origin of the State Among the Nomads of Asia," in *The Early State*, ed. Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník, vol. 32 (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 95. Emil Brunner writes that 'there has never been, and never could be, a State-less condition of human society' in *Justice and the Social Order*, trans. Mary Hottinger (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), 174.

society, and the individual, elements of this can be found, especially where it is the state which forms society from atomized, isolated individuals.

The doctrine of creation covers the divine origins of things, not merely in a historical sense, but also in the ontological sense of the divine dependence of all creatures on God. Therefore, a strong connection exists between the quest for origins of things, and how these descriptions relate to God. John Polkinghorne, writing of debates over the origins of the universe, says, 'Theology is concerned with ontological origins and not with temporal beginning.'² This is also an important statement to proclaim in political theology, for as this chapter will highlight, the act of describing the temporal, historical origin of the state is something different from describing its ontological origins.

The value we give to things, such as the state, is often influenced by our understanding of their ontological and historical origins. For example, if something originates apart from God that means it has its origins in sinful separation from God. This is the traditional understanding of sin and violence.³ For this reason, locating the origins of the secular state apart from God is of critical importance to both Milbank and Cavanaugh in making the state appear profane. Milbank and Cavanaugh, in making connections between the origins of the state and how we are to judge it, are acting in line with the universal obsession with the origins of things.⁴ This is witnessed in the strong impulse to explain things largely through where they came from. This is the basis of the widely held genetic theory of the state: the view that the true essence of the state can be found in its historical origins alone. This view extends back to Aristotle: 'He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them.'⁵ This genetic impulse is commonly found in modern quests for the historical origins of the state.

The first section of the chapter will show how Milbank and Cavanaugh argue that the state is profane because of its historical origins in heretical theology and violence. Milbank's vision is wider and deeper, locating the state in the overall rise of the secular. Cavanaugh's is a slightly narrower vision, attributing the origins of the state to war. Both their accounts of the origins of the modern state strike a very modern note of criticism in seeing the politics of modernity in stark contrast to the politics that preceded it.

2. John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker* (London: SPCK, 1994), 73.

3. Augustine's view of evil was that it is the corruption of the good. See Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), XI.9, 22.

4. See Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), 29; Joanne H. Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3.

5. Aristotle, "The Politics," in *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1252a24–25. A more modern statement of this view is found in Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University, July 11, 1919," in *Collected Works, Volume 29: March – August 1919*, ed. George Hanna (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 473.

The central part of the chapter examines the the origins of the state according to biblical and theological traditions. Because Milbank and Cavanaugh are primarily concerned with the historical evidence for the state's origins, seeing its origins apart from God's work, they do not have to address the theological case that God is involved in the making and use of the political systems and rulers, including the modern state. In this they are out of step with the rich theological traditions that described the state's ontological origins in God.

Finally, the chapter will seek to reconcile historical and theological perspectives on the origins of the state.

The Politics of Creation in Milbank and Cavanaugh

In the following treatment of Milbank and Cavanaugh, we start to see the origins of the profane state and the concomitant decline of the political church. While Milbank and Cavanaugh have different emphases and place the origins of the state at different points, their positions are mutually reinforcing.

Milbank and the Secular Origins of the State

Milbank claims that the modern state is dangerously totalitarian, which, in dominating society, has taken over powers from other associations, has monopolized and increased violence, and has grown inhumanly bureaucratic. How did this political form come about? Milbank shares with Cavanaugh an understanding of the modern state as theologically constructed out of heretical Christian theological ideas and practices, leading to a separation of politics from theology. This section examines how Milbank locates the source of the profane modern state in the rise of the secular age, which originated in the High Middle Ages. Determining these origins is a task that Milbank places at the heart of his project of describing the history and genealogy of the theologies and anti-theologies of the modern world.⁶ Less interested in the question of ultimate origins of politics, Milbank locates the origins of the state in the new secular political science of modernity.⁷ The main concerns here are with Milbank's account of the rise of absolute state sovereignty, based in origins of the secular, and the ontology of violence, which both contribute to the modern state's *mythos*. One purpose here is to describe the 'secular' that Milbank thinks we need to be redeemed from, which will be referred back to in the discussion of his redemptive proposals discussed in Chapter 5.

6. John Milbank, "The Body by Love Possessed: Christianity and Late Capitalism in Britain," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 82.

7. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 10.

'Once, there was no "secular".'⁸ This famous opening line to Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* sets the agenda for what follows in this work. By placing 'secular' in quote marks, Milbank draws attention to the disputed and various ways in which this concept is understood. Traditionally, the secular (*saeculum*) was understood in Christianity as 'the interval between fall and *eschaton*.'⁹ Nowadays, it represents more of a 'domain', as Milbank calls it, or that sphere which is not religious. This is seen in the constitutions of officially secular states, being those that have no favoured religion and do not make religious tests for political office.¹⁰ Such a secularity attempts to make a secular domain, as seen, for example, in secular schools where no religion lies at the heart of them. By ridding this domain of religion, it operates '*etsi Deus non daretur*' (as if there were no God).¹¹ The carving out of a secular domain, Milbank argues, had to be instituted or imagined, both in theory and in practice.¹²

According to Milbank, the origins of this imaginative shift to the secular were laid in mediaeval thought, mainly in the false ontology of Scotus, who 'set us on the intellectual course to modernity.'¹³ Within Radical Orthodoxy, Scotus is blamed for initiating the secular in two ways: through the 'univocity' of being, and 'knowledge by representation'.¹⁴ The univocity of being describes an ontology whereby 'being' is something that God and creatures share in, meaning that creatures relate to being independently of God. This simply means that things can exist apart from God, with this in turn creating a realm of the secular that has complete independence from God. This is opposed to ontologies that see all creatures participating in God, which preserves the connection of everything to God. Knowledge as representation altered the focus of knowledge from the objects to the subject, and, in turn, the focus of modern epistemology changed from *what* we know to *how* we know something. This assisted the birth of the secular by removing the illumination of the knower by God, as described in patristic thought. Through these moves, a space autonomous from the transcendent began and, along with it, disciplines such as epistemology, which had no regard for God.¹⁵ In this way the secular was born, and human sciences – including political science – were able to gain footholds as areas of life independent of the increasingly side-lined theology.

A result of the rise of the secular was the secularization of politics, as just one discipline eventually prized away from participation in God. This secularization has two effects. Politics becomes removed from God, and it also becomes limited in its

8. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 9.

10. The Constitution of the United States of America, for example, outlaws religious tests for public office (Article Six), and disallows any established church (First Amendment).

11. *Ibid.*, 13.

12. *Ibid.*, 9.

13. Milbank, "On Theological Transgression," 159.

14. Milbank, "Alternative Protestantism," 26–27.

15. Which is why Radical Orthodoxy wishes to ground all disciplines in theology. See Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, "Suspending the material," 3.

ends: 'Once the political is seen as a permanent natural sphere, pursuing positive finite ends, then, inevitably, firm lines of division arise between what is "secular" and what is "spiritual".'¹⁶ As will be shown in Chapter 5, Milbank's redemptive proposals for complex space and hazy boundaries between church and state seek to overcome such a reduction to these secular categories.

A problem Milbank faces in his narration of the origins of the secular is how it comes from a thoroughly Christian society. Like his assertion of the master discourse of theology, it can seem that Milbank asserts, rather than argues for, the position that the modern state emerges from the corruption of mediaeval theology. Nevertheless, Milbank suggests that the church failed to retain its integrity, and thus had its own fall:

That it was first of all the Church, the *sacerdotium*, rather than the *regnum*, which assumed traits of modern secularity – legal formalization, rational instrumentalization, sovereign rule, economic contractualism – ought to give us pause for thought.¹⁷

No longer grounded in participation in God, politics becomes nihilistic and 'grounded literally in nothing'.¹⁸ Yet it began to win adherents as an alternative *mythos* to that of Christianity, and also within theology. These competing *mythoi* define Milbank's grand narrative of human history and thought. First was an ancient *mythos*, then a Christian one, initiated by Christ, then, finally, in modernity there is a secular *mythos*, which is partially a recapitulation of pagan *mythos*. The history of political thought relates to these *mythoi*, and no political age or philosophy is without one. Milbank aims to expose the state for what it is through narrating the content of its secular *mythos*. It comprises an ontology of violence and absolute state sovereignty, as described below.

Milbank's main work, *Theology and Social Theory*, has as its major theme the ontology of violence that lies at the heart of secular thought. With ontology being separate from the peaceable God, the secular ontology is an ontology of violence. To counter this nihilistic *mythos*, Milbank believes one must assert an ontology of peace: 'one can try to put forward an alternative *mythos*, equally unfounded, but nonetheless embodying an "ontology of peace".'¹⁹ His critics sometimes say he asserts this violently, undercutting his supposed peaceful alternative.²⁰ Significant here, given the structure of the present thesis, is that Milbank's narration of the Christian *mythos* leaps from creation to redemption, with no time for preservation between the two. Yet, as

16. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 412.

17. *Ibid.*, 18.

18. Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, "Suspending the material," 3.

19. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 279.

20. Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 73–77; Christopher J. Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism*, Faith in Reason (London: SCM Press, 2004), 133.

the next chapter will show, the doctrine of preservation, as it relates to the preservation of human society against the forces of sin and chaos, provides a justification for the state .

It is this agnostic *mythos* that allows for the state to be profane in Milbank, since the state is based in violence and deviant philosophy: 'Here I show that from the outset the secular is complicit with an "ontology of violence", a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force.'²¹ For Milbank, it is this ontology of violence that under-girds the secular state.²² It is easy to see how this operates in Hobbes, whose primordial anthropology describes individuals at war with one another, and resolved by the latent and real violence of the Leviathan. This mythology becomes another religious *mythos*, and being violent implicates the state as profane. Hobbes's state of nature is just one foundational myth, but it shares characteristics with many others. In Greek mythology, as Milbank describes it, the gods formed the world by taming a primordial chaos and violence.²³ By contrast, *Creatio ex nihilo*, as affirmed by Christianity, affirms creation as the gift and act of God in love, which makes violence and evil privative of this good. Peace and harmony are for the Christians the way things are, contrary to secular and pagan thought.

For Milbank, it is not simply that the state is violent; violence can sometimes be justified as the force necessary for policing.²⁴ Rather, it is the acceptance of such 'violence' as the way things are, and have to be. It is easier to understand Milbank's point here if we understand it in reverse, examining the ontology inherent in social theory, rather than the social theory which comes from an ontology of violence. Social theory tries to explain 'the way things really are'.²⁵ To make such an explanation is to make an ontological statement about fundamental realities. Milbank finds that sociology and political philosophy explain social reality as being essentially violent. For instance, Milbank cites Georg Simmel as posing "'an ontology of conflict" in radical antithesis to Christianity'.²⁶

Just as Milbank asserts a peaceable ontology over secularism's ontology of violence, in place of the univocal ontology of Duns Scotus and Gilles Deleuze (see page 68 above), Milbank asserts a Platonic ontology of participation, in which everything participates in God.²⁷ Milbank's position has the result that, since nothing is separate

21. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 4.

22. Ibid., 279.

23. Ibid., 262.

24. Milbank believes that World War II was a just war, see "Christian Peace: A Conversation between Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank," in *Must Christianity be Violent?: Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*, ed. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 209.

25. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 220.

26. Ibid., 82.

27. Milbank calls this a 'Platonic, neo-Platonic and Catholic "analogical ontology"' in *ibid.*, xxi. For Deleuze's treatment of the univocity of being see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 44–51, 79, 377–378.

from God, there is no realm of evil or secular, since everything is created and sustained by God, and is in immediate relation to God. Platonic ontology is based on Plato's notion of the forms in which the particular instances of things participate in the pure form of that thing in a supernatural realm. The result of Christianising this ontological framework is that all things participate in God for their being. Endorsement of this ontology has profound implications for Milbank: 'the Catholic vision of ontological peace now provides the only alternative to a nihilistic outlook.'²⁸ Milbank's approach makes questions of ontology fundamental to the task of theology, including its political and moral theology. This view suggests that philosophy is primarily concerned with being, and then only secondarily with phenomenology, logic, grammar, or ethics. For Milbank then, it is important to get the ontology right, with everything else following from that.²⁹ In all these assessments Milbank suggests, we cannot simply ignore ontological questions to focus on practice. This is because every political system 'requires an account of human nature and of the role of human beings within the cosmos; otherwise it is not clear why there is something now lacking that needs to be emancipated, nor why one should suppose that we live in a reality within which such emancipation is possible.'³⁰

Milbank's concern with the ontology of secular sphere lies at the heart of his political theology and his criticism of the rise of state sovereignty. He identifies the origins of the modern state with the modern suggestion that it is over the secular political sphere which it can claim absolute sovereignty. This deep concern with the concept of sovereignty in Milbank's political theology provides a useful focal point for his explanation of how modernity went wrong and where society might find its political redemption. The concept of sovereignty provides a useful connection between Milbank's less accessible philosophical writings and his practical political suggestions as the cure for the ills of modern society. There are strong parallels here with the English tradition of political pluralism. This tradition denies the absolute sovereignty of states, claiming that social groupings maintain sovereignty over their own affairs. This was the case in the complex space of mediaeval times to which Milbank hearkens back.

The mediaeval period is also the time in which Milbank locates the origins of state sovereignty. Milbank links the sovereignty of the modern state with Scotus's theology insofar as it provided a 'new conception of earthly authority as legitimate according

28. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 442. The first edition reads 'the absolute Christian vision . . .' Perhaps in this emendation Milbank is making an identification between Catholic and Christianity and rendering non-Catholic forms of Christianity nihilistic. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 434. A similar update (to 'Catholic ontology') appears at *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 362, with 'Christian ontology' found at *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 359.

29. John Milbank, "Faith, Reason, and Imagination: The Study of Theology and Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 321.

30. John Milbank, "Materialism and Transcendence," in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 393.

to the exercise of power by a single sovereign center if constituted by, and exercised in, the right formal terms, quite apart from the question of the inherent justice of its acts.³¹ No longer did acts of the state refer to 'divine order or cosmic hierarchy'.³² Not surprisingly, given his appreciation for analogical reasoning, Milbank agrees with Schmitt that state sovereignty is analogous to the sovereignty of God.³³ Milbank bases this on the parallel between the modern notions of absolute sovereignty and the medieval notion of the absolute sovereignty of God. But he considers as 'facile' any direct transfer of voluntarist sovereignty 'from God and the sacred to the human and secular.'³⁴

An absolute notion of sovereignty residing in the state renders the sovereignty of other associations dependent on the state, for otherwise there would be a source of sovereignty outside the state. State absolutism renders the church, then, in the position of being a mere voluntary association, but one dependent on the state. Milbank and Cavanaugh cannot accept that the church could ever be in this position under the state. The development of a secular space involved the alteration of the church from being a political body, to having merely suasive influence within society.³⁵ For these reasons, Milbank, like Cavanaugh, laments the de-politicization of the church, and wishes to re-politicize the church in the form of a politicized ecclesiology.

Central to Milbank's understanding of the modern state is his account of the growth of state sovereignty, which has simplified social space. His political theology is largely dominated by this motif, explaining the genesis of the modern state through how this sovereignty came about and finding the redemption of human society in the dissolution of state sovereignty into a more complex society. In narrating the growth and acceptance of the concept of state sovereignty, Milbank blames several early-modern political philosophers for these ideas, namely Hugo Grotius, Hobbes, Jean Bodin, and Baruch Spinoza. To Milbank, it is Bodin who is primarily (but not solely) responsible for the development of the modern view of absolute sovereignty that resides in the modern state. This finds a theological root in the notion of an 'infinite God, defined mainly by an unlimited will.'³⁶

For Milbank, the new theory of sovereignty is profoundly theological, in that the divine sanction exists initially but is pushed into the background and eventually disappears, replacing it with its own *mythos* or theology.³⁷ In such a way, the state is

31. John Milbank, "The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 310.

32. Ibid., 310.

33. John Milbank, "Paul against Biopolitics," *Theory Culture Society* 25, no. 7–8 (December 2008): 130. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36. Cavanaugh, as seen below shares with Milbank his enthusiasm for Schmitt's insight.

34. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 27.

35. Ibid., 19.

36. John Milbank, "Atonement: Christ the exception," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 98.

37. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 27.

then created and justified through a false theology. And in endorsing this new state, theology indirectly affirms a false and deviant theology which has replaced God with this *mythos*. For Milbank, then, state sovereignty rests on a false god.

In Milbank's criticisms of state sovereignty, he echoes many of the complaints of the English traditions of Anglo-Catholicism and political pluralism. Ernest Barker, an English pluralist, argues that it was the Nonconformists who were the original discreditors of the state within England, but that since 1833 this title shifted to the 'high Anglican'.³⁸ Milbank shares their concerns, which, according to Barker, are that the 'Church is a substantive body independent of the State, with its own origin in divine foundation, its own continuity in virtue of apostolical descent, its own rights in virtue of its origin and continuity.'³⁹ Barker named John Neville Figgis as carrying this tradition of Anglican discrediting forward.

The modern state comes late in the story Milbank narrates. By the time we get to someone like Hobbes, the outcome is almost inevitable – a nominalist, voluntarist state based in nihilism. Such a state commands absolute sovereignty over atomized individuals, and is based on violence in order to overcome the chaos which lies at the heart of its ontological commitments. With the state's origins found in heretical theology, it becomes profane. But for Milbank, this is not inevitable, for what holds the modern state together is not the force of the ideas that underpin it, but its *mythos*. At ground, Milbank agrees with the thesis that every society has some *mythos* or metaphysical grounding, even if, as in the case of secular modernity, it is explicitly denied. In Milbank's account of the various *mythoi*, we do not find a simple progression over time. Modern figures can ground their thought in an ancient *mythos*, for instance, as he finds in Girard.⁴⁰ To out-narrate this *mythos* requires an alternative *mythos*:

Yet Christianity implicitly (if not in practice) puts an end to this division, because in the life of Christ a new *mythos* is established which replaced and resituated the *mythos* of antiquity. Christianity is now the *lien logique du mythe et de l'histoire* in the following way: Christ is the founder of a new city, which, uniquely, does not refer to a story of primal murder, primal sacrifice and expulsion (like the story of Romulus and Remus) but traces its descent from a sacrificial victim who had no material issue.⁴¹

Milbank's account of the origins of the state is largely an idealist one – the ideas of Scotus, Bodin, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Grotius made the state what it is now. Their *mythos* of state sovereignty, which displaced the medieval Christian *mythos*, makes

38. Ernest Barker, "The Discredited State," in *Church, State and Study: Essays* (London: Methuen, 1930), 154-155.

39. Ibid., 156.

40. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 397-398.

41. Ibid., 72.

the state discontinuous with the political structures that preceded it. The modern developments of sovereignty, rights, and so on, mean that the state as we now have it is grounded in false theology and in an ontology of violence. Theologies of the modern state are basically heretical, with the state therefore being profane.

As seen below, there are historians who find such structural factors important in the formation of the state. But they would not necessarily serve as a support to Milbank, but may in fact offer an alternative, more materialist, account of the state. Of course, Milbank rejects this voluntarist and nominalist notion of the state. But to reject the modern state on this basis requires that this account is true, or at least plausible. Milbank clearly thinks it is. But is there anything more that can be said about this idealist notion than that the figures he identifies – Hobbes, Spinoza, and Grotius – created the modern state out of the false theology and praxis of the medieval church? What is missing in Milbank is the connection of these ideas to the concrete realities of the rise of the state.

To get to the base of this, Milbank examines the basis of voluntarism: the idea of the priority of the will which developed in medieval theology. This was a contingent deviation from a theology which favoured the rational ordering of the universe based in the reason of God, and not, as in voluntarism, God's arbitrary will. To Milbank, voluntarism became part of the 'liberal-Protestant metanarrative' grounded in Troeltsch and Weber.⁴²

Milbank's criticism of voluntarism is largely targetted at Hobbes. This is partly for what voluntarism does to the church: makes it a creation of the will of sovereign Leviathan. The voluntarism of the state renders the church a mere voluntary association. In order to make the church a political body, as both Milbank and Cavanaugh wish to, they must overcome this voluntarist position, which they see as false.⁴³ Their argument here is as much legal as theological. Originating with Pope Innocent IV, the doctrine of *persona ficta* renders such associations fictitious.⁴⁴

That the will came to be preferred over intellect led to an individualizing move, which led to nominalism. How did this shift take place? Milbank blames bad theology which preferred monotheistic unity of will to orthodox Trinitarianism, which saw in unity a unity of mind and action.⁴⁵ A link was therefore forged between 'monotheism and monarchic unity'.⁴⁶ He further writes: 'A bureaucratic regime of a socialist,

42. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 95.

43. Cavanaugh, "The City," 192, 199n39.

44. See F. W. Maitland, "Translator's Introduction," in *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, by Otto Gierke, trans. Frederic William Maitland (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xix. Further work could be done here on the influence of this tradition in the work of Milbank and Cavanaugh. The origins of this tradition lie in the work of Otto Gierke, and his introduction to the English reader by Frederic William Maitland. Maitland in turn influenced one of Cavanaugh's main sources, Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Dealing fully with all this voluminous material in English Pluralism is beyond the scope here, which is merely to show how Milbank and Cavanaugh use it uncritically to affirm the church as a social body in its own right.

45. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 15.

46. *Ibid.*, 15.

or other kind, will suppress polytheistic variety, and with this the impulse of the liberative will which is the legacy of Western monotheism.⁴⁷

In discussing Hobbes, Milbank finds that he reduces the state to nominalist assumptions; the state is the invention of individuals and has no essence.⁴⁸ To Milbank, Hobbes's state is both voluntarist and nominalist, being a mere voluntary association with no essence apart from the individual elements. This is the only sense in which the state can be a creator, albeit a creator of a special sort. Being the creature of contracting individuals, the state makes society between these same individuals. The implications of this view are followed through more fully in Cavanaugh, when discussing the unity offered by the state.

It is outside the scope of the present work to provide a full appraisal of all Milbank's philosophical moves and positions. Others, as surveyed in Chapter 1, have tried this. Another approach is to show that Milbank is wrong about the origins of the secular, as Jeffrey Stout has claimed to do in his alternative account of the secular.⁴⁹ Stout argues that the public space became increasingly secularized as the Bible lost its authority in public debate. While many traditions, Stout notes, have authoritative interpreters of scripture, the early modern post-Reformation period was characterized by many political groupings claiming authoritative readings of scripture. Yet their profound and insurmountable differences in interpretation meant that appeals to the Bible soon lost their purchase in public discourse. It was apparent that in public debate, differences had to be resolved by means other than the Bible. This brought about the secularization of public life and politics.⁵⁰ He concludes that in no way does secularization of this kind necessitate a commitment to secularism, secular liberalism, any other ideology or the secular state.⁵¹ The subtext of Stout's conclusions is that Radical Orthodoxy flattens the secular into a stereotype, without acknowledging the differences between 'secularism' and 'secularisation' and the multifarious forms these take. He also believes that confessional heterogeneity is a fact of life, and one that can be neither wished away, nor transformed coercively into a homogeneous society.⁵² Of course, the narration of the secular which Stout has starts in the early-modern period. Milbank goes back much further than that to Scotus in the High Middle Ages, some three hundred years before Stout's beginning point. One would hesitate to say that such selections of the beginning of the secular are arbitrary, but it does highlight the differences on the authority of history and the lack of a point outside history to judge between various options here.

An overall appraisal of Milbank's narration of the origins of the state will come later in the chapter, following a discussion of Cavanaugh. Milbank remains critical of

47. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 99.

48. *Ibid.*, 14.

49. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 100–102.

50. *Ibid.*, 93–97.

51. *Ibid.*, 97.

52. *Ibid.*, 100.

theologians who adopt the knowledge and methods of the secular disciplines (such as sociology) in an uncritical fashion, since they are grounded in bad parodies of true theology, and grounded in violent pagan ontologies.

Cavanaugh and the State's Violent Origins

Like Milbank, Cavanaugh also writes of the competing *mythoi* of state and church, which for him oppose each other in offering competing solutions for the fundamental political problem of bringing about and sustaining the unity of human societies. This, as he sees it, is the problem which exercised the minds of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and other political theorists. While accepting the problem, Cavanaugh's solution is theological, and not secular.

In the way Cavanaugh frames their conflicting solutions, both state and church address the same problem of disunity, and both attempt, in their different ways, to bring about the unity of humanity into a social body. For Cavanaugh, then, there are not 'two essentially different spheres of discourse', with one 'political' and the other 'religious'. Rather, there is one story about 'conflict and reconciliation' with two very different tellings.⁵³ This antagonism between the narratives of church and state lies at the heart of Cavanaugh's political theology.

While both church and state try to solve the problem of disunity, they differ in where the origins of the problem lie. In describing 'the Christian story', Cavanaugh goes to Genesis 1 to locate the 'natural unity of the human race.'⁵⁴ Fall from this primordial harmony comes through the disobedience of Adam, Cain's fratricide, and the scattering at Babel, all of which created individuals with a need for redemption from this disunity.⁵⁵ Redemption, for Cavanaugh, is found in reunifying humanity through the practice of the Eucharist. Contrasted with the Christian story, Cavanaugh describes 'the state story'.⁵⁶ This is modernity's political history, beginning not with unity but 'from an assumption of the essential individuality of the human race' in the state of nature.⁵⁷ Political salvation comes through the social contract. Yet, despite their differing starting points, 'both accounts agree that salvation is essentially a matter of making peace among competing individuals. It is in soteriology, in other words, that the ends of the Christian *mythos* and the state *mythos* seem to coincide.'⁵⁸ Politics originates for Cavanaugh in the human will to unity. The origins of the politics

53. See Cavanaugh, "Discerning," 196.

54. Cavanaugh, "The City," 183.

55. Another perspective is that the spreading out of humanity is a fulfilment of the divine mandate to multiply and fill the Earth, against the tendencies of humanity to want to stay put and centralize in Babel. See Martin Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically: An Introduction to Mosaic Political Philosophy* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 128.

56. Cavanaugh, "The City," 186–190.

57. *Ibid.*, 186.

58. *Ibid.*, 187.

of both church and state are soteriological, originating in saviour figures, either the politics of the body of Christ, or in the profane political body of the state.

Cavanaugh's framing of the problem of disunity is central to his political theology, but he does not establish his case for this being *the* political problem. He accepts the problem of disunity and the primordial natural unity of humanity as given, even though they also form the ontological foundations of competing theories of the state to his. The idea of unity as *the* political problem does not come from nowhere; it springs from the medieval principle of *principium unitatis*.⁵⁹ That unity between people is thought possible implies the inherent sociability of humans, a position that is the basis of the naturalistic foundation of the state.⁶⁰ This theory of sociability, or, in other words, the idea that humans are inherently political creatures, is usually attributed to Aristotle.⁶¹ As a theory of the state, that the state is the highest form of human association derives from this view of the unity possible in human life. Yet, this theory runs counter to Cavanaugh's view that the unity offered by the state depends on the natural disunity of individuals in the state of nature. This exposes another difference in the unity wanted by Cavanaugh. In the mediaeval period, unity was also considered an ideal, but the sort of unity wanted by someone like Dante was the unity of church and state.⁶² In narrating the modern quest for unity, Cavanaugh presents the options as either through the church or through the state, with the state excluded from being a part of the unity that God brings.

When he turns to the specific origins of the modern state, Cavanaugh finds another expression of the attempt to solve the problem of disunity, this time expressed in how the so-called 'wars of religion' between Catholics and Protestants are narrated. To Cavanaugh, the state claims it emerged to bring unity and peace to the warring parties by providing a neutral space (politics) in which their differences could be set aside. Of how the story is told, he writes:

It has a foundational importance for the secular West, because it explains the origin of its way of life and its system of governance. It is a creation myth for modernity. Like the ancient Hebrew Genesis or the Babylonian Enuma Elish, it tells a story of the overcoming of primordial chaos by the

59. Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans., with an introduction by Frederic William Maitland (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 9; Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of the Peace*, ed. and trans. Annabel Brett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114n1. Unity was also a special focus of Aquinas in "De regimine principum," in *Aquinas: Political Writings*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5–52.

60. John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of S. Augustine's 'City of God'* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1921), 38.

61. Aristotle, "The Politics," 1253a2.

62. Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. and trans. Pru Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), I.viii, xv. Also see Figgis, *Political Aspects*, 100.

forces of order. The myth of the wars of religion is also a soteriology, a story of our salvation from mortal peril.⁶³

For Cavanaugh, this is a myth because the 'centralized bureaucratic state *preceded* these wars'.⁶⁴ The wars of religion did not make the modern state, but this is narrated in such a way as to be a believable *mythos* for modern people.

It may not have been the 'wars of religion' that made the state, but, for Cavanaugh, it was war nonetheless: the wars of the state against internal powers and in defining territorial boundaries.⁶⁵ Cavanaugh's account of the rise of the state depends heavily on a strand of historical sociology that makes a strong link between war-making and the formation of the state. He cites Otto Hintze, Perry Anderson, Hendrik Spruyt, Anthony Giddens, Victor Burke, and others, in claiming a 'wide acceptance', or even 'consensus', on the link between war-making and state-building.⁶⁶ But bellicism is not the only explanation of state formation.

Against this bellicist 'consensus', one does not need to go far to find other models of state formation. In his essay 'Theories of State Formation' in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, Gianfranco Poggi describes three summary views in contemporary scholarship on state formation; 'The Managerial Perspective' (based on the work of Joseph Strayer and Harold Bermans), 'The Military Perspective' (based on the work of Otto Hintze and Charles Tilly), and 'The Economic Perspective' (as witnessed in Karl Marx, Perry Anderson and Barrington Moore, Jr.).⁶⁷ In a similar essay, Thomas Ertman breaks down recent research on European state building into three streams being warfare, rational choice theory, and the 'cultural turn' associated with the work of Julia Adams and Philip Gorski.⁶⁸

To fully examine all these theories is beyond the task here, which is merely to raise doubts about Cavanaugh's claimed 'consensus' for the view that the origins and development of the modern state lie solely in war-making. Where Cavanaugh errs is in making war and violence the sole root of the modern state. But we should be wary about single-variable explanations. Things are usually much more complex than having a single cause. Cavanaugh falls for this simplistic account of origins of the state because he needs it to cast the state as profane and good for nothing. Born in bellicism, the state can only be profane.

Cavanaugh's historical account of the state relies on the work of respectable sources in historical scholarship and sociology. But what is notable about his account

63. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.

64. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 29.

65. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 162–163.

66. *Ibid.*, 163, 262n232.

67. Gianfranco Poggi, "Theories of State Formation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, ed. Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 95–106.

68. Thomas Ertman, "State Formation and State Building in Europe," in *The Handbook of Political Sociology: States, Civil Societies and Globalization*, ed. Thomas Janoski, Robert R. Alford, Alexander M. Hicks, and Mildred A. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 378.

of the rise of the state is its limited scope. The question of the origins of the modern state remains one of the most debated topics in modern historical scholarship, with no clear consensus on what the state is, or when it came to be. Scholars place the origins of the modern state at any time from the middle ages onwards, with the modern welfare state not emerging until after the Second World War. This is not a debate that can be resolved here, but if pieces of his argument are doubtful it will challenge Cavanaugh's conclusions. One possible criticism is to show that the church contributed to the rise of the state in non-violent ways. The church was, at times, heavily involved in the state, providing it with services and personnel.⁶⁹ Another source of this view is Joseph R. Strayer, who believes that the church played a rôle in the formation of the modern state by having some of the attributes needed for state development: 'for example, enduring institutions—and was developing others—for example, a theory of papal sovereignty.'⁷⁰ These practices and theories were in constant contact with politics since government could not take place without ongoing interaction with the church. Church teaching also had an impact: 'The Church was also teaching that secular rulers were bound to give peace and justice to their subjects—a doctrine which logically demanded the creation of new judicial and administrative institutions.'⁷¹ But for Strayer, the church was only one influence among many, and was not a sufficient cause of the modern state. Strayer also addresses an issue that preoccupies Cavanaugh: the relationship between war and the rise of the state. According to Strayer, while war had a rôle in the development of the state, it also stunted the growth of the state.⁷² Again, there is no space here for a full examination of the historical material marshalled in support of Cavanaugh's thesis, or that which might challenge it. More important here is his construal of history and what Cavanaugh is doing in relating this history. Suffice it to say that this history is more highly contentious than Cavanaugh admits.

In his endeavour, Cavanaugh confirms the thesis discussed below (on page 98): that one selects a starting point in the narration of origins where one finds the most interesting *change*. In this task, Cavanaugh tries to make the state discontinuous with what went before it. In doing this, 'Cavanaugh downplays what the modern state has in common with earlier forms of political community, namely the purpose of creating the physical conditions for human flourishing.'⁷³ Cavanaugh's history of the state downplays any mention of its providing any temporal goods. Part of the problem here is that Cavanaugh lacks an adequate theory of the purpose of human government. In his analysis of the origins of government, he finds only a false soteriology; he does

69. See Hélène Millet and Peter Moraw, "Clerics in the State," in *Power Elites and State Building*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 173–188.

70. Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 15–16. Also see Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 113–115.

71. Strayer, *Medieval Origins*, 16.

72. *Ibid.*, 58–60.

73. Shadle, "Cavanaugh on the Church," 269.

not find, as others in the tradition have, any social or communal goods that help to explain the formation of human government or the state. Where others find in the state a promoter of the common good and social order, Cavanaugh only finds mere parodies of these goods.

Part of the reason for this is Cavanaugh's enthusiasm for the analysis of Carl Schmitt who famously wrote that, 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts'.⁷⁴ Cavanaugh depends on this passage in several places, but it largely underscores his view of the origins of politics and the state.⁷⁵ Cavanaugh wants to believe this because it makes the state profane. He therefore sees the rôle of the state as being to do what the church should do, since the state is merely a parasite on theology and has no independence from being a corruption of theological concepts. The origins of the state become the mirror image of the origins of Christ. Because Christ came to save, the state comes to save. And since Cavanaugh believes he has found in history a place – in the wars of religion – in which the state 'saves', he has proved this point. This short-circuits any genuinely theological basis for anything other than a profane state because it is defined as parasitic on the church, the way evil is parasitic on the good. This christological analysis can be extended into the profane origins of the state, by comparing, analogously, the sacred origins of Christ with the violent origins of the Antichrist.

While Cavanaugh never directly calls the state the Antichrist, there are two ways in which the state can be described as fulfilling the rôle of the Antichrist in his theology. First, as shown above, Cavanaugh shows how Church and state have the competing doctrine of salvation. While Christ offers true salvation through His church, the state as Antichrist offers a false parody of this salvation. The second way in which the state is the Antichrist is seen in the parallels between the violent origins of Cavanaugh's state and the violent origins of the Antichrist, as understood by Christian traditions. Through this interpretation of Cavanaugh, it will bring to light his method of describing the history of the state and how this is set up in opposition to the church. Furthermore, since Christ and the Antichrist are opposites, it is possible to learn about Cavanaugh's Christ from a consideration of his implied Antichrist.

The Antichrist has sometimes been identified with political figures.⁷⁶ Some anarchists have seen the state as the devil, as C. J. Friedrich observed in early twentieth century: 'The only radical opposition has, in recent times, come from anarchists who, denying the ethical value of the political community, have insisted that it is the devil

74. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

75. Cavanaugh discusses this quote in "Messianic Nation: A Christian Theological Critique of American Exceptionalism," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005): 267–268; "If You Render Unto God What Is God's, What Is Left for Caesar?" *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 607–619; "Separation and Wholeness: Notes on the Unsettling Political Presence of the Body of Christ," in *For the Sake of the World: Swedish Ecclesiology in Dialogue with William T. Cavanaugh*, ed. Jonas Idestrom, Church of Sweden Research Series (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 23.

76. See Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 45–50, 260.

incarnate which stands in the way of all that is desirable.⁷⁷ Here, however, the emphasis is on the parallel between the violent origins of Cavanaugh's state and the violent origins of the Antichrist. This is apparent in the traditional contrast between the pure birth of Christ and the profane origins of the Antichrist. Adso of Montier-en-Der, in the mediaeval text *Libellus de ortu et tempore Antichristi*, says that, unlike Christ, the Antichrist was 'born as the result of sexual intercourse of his mother and father, like other men.' In this account, the Antichrist will be 'conceived entirely in sin, he will be engendered in sin, and he will be born in sin.' In contrast to Christ, the devil, rather than the Holy Spirit, will enter the womb of the Antichrist's mother.⁷⁸ Hildegard of Bingen gave a later account of the origins of the Antichrist in *Scivias*. The Antichrist's mother was full of vice and a fornicator, not knowing which man inseminated her. Once born the 'son of perdition will be nurtured by the Devil's arts until he comes to full adulthood.'⁷⁹ Hildegard also writes of the lies and deception of the Antichrist in claiming to be a false saviour with political ambitions: 'he will join with kings, dukes, princes and the rich, crushing humility and exalting pride, and by the Devil's arts subjecting the whole world to himself.'⁸⁰ Other traditions variously show that the Antichrist was conceived in incest, and born by Caesarean section, and so not only not born of a woman as Jesus was, but also killing his mother in being born.⁸¹ Born of human lust and incest, the Antichrist is profane, coming from depravity and violence, and for this reason is not worthy of human devotion or praise.

An analogy can be drawn between these traditional accounts of the origins of the Antichrist and how the origins of the state are described by Cavanaugh, with both being judged to be profane due to their origins. Not only, according to Cavanaugh, is the modern state born in violence, but it also, like the Antichrist, offers a false salvation for humanity – away from one's primary allegiance to a church and to allegiance to the "peace-making" state. Statist political theory misleads people about the true state of humanity in order to deceive people to give allegiance to the state and not Christ and His church. Following Hildegard, we might also construe that Satan, being the father of lies (John 8:44), tries to deceive us about the origins of the state, which does not bring peace or salvation, but only more of the warring from which the Antichrist comes. As shown above, Cavanaugh sees the true origins of the state in war and violence.

It is intriguing here that Cavanaugh rarely resorts to scripture to support his political commitments. One might have thought that in the demonization of the state, Revelation 13 would prove useful to him. Heinrich Schlier, commenting on

77. C. J. Friedrich, "The Deification of The State," *The Review of Politics* 1, no. 1 (January 1939): 29.

78. Cited in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 132–133.

79. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 502.

80. *Ibid.*, 502.

81. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born*, 125–142.

Revelation 13, calls 'this world state' an instrument of Satan, which 'Instead of serving God, this political power works to serve God's enemy.'⁸² Yet, while there are parallels here between this interpretation of Revelation 13 and an Antichrist state, as found in Cavanaugh, to go to Revelation 13 traditionally entails considering its opposite image in Romans 13.⁸³ According to some traditions of political theology, this text is a more positive image of the 'state', with these two views showing the best and worst of the state. Cavanaugh short circuits this tension by making the state an Antichrist, which never works for the good. Whereas some would see here a state which can be sometimes good and sometimes bad, Cavanaugh sees pure rivalry that cannot be resolved or mediated. Yet this move can never fully succeed, since the Antichrist does not have its own ontological existence that can be denied or avoided. Rather, the Antichrist and the evil it promotes, is derivative from Christ and parasitic on the good.⁸⁴

For Cavanaugh, the modern state is not only *created* through profane violence, but also becomes a *creator* of civil society. He reasons that the state creates civil society, since 'there were no such thing as societies, in the sense of clearly bounded and unitary systems of interaction, until the birth of the modern state.'⁸⁵ Cavanaugh agrees with Milbank, that the state simplifies space, with the modern state replacing the complex space of guilds, families, clans, and other overlapping groupings with a levelled space with one ultimate allegiance owed to the sovereign.⁸⁶ For Cavanaugh, this rules out the notion that the state comes from the evolution of civil society, with the implication that civil society cannot be a non-statist space within society.

Cavanaugh's critique of the modern state's absorption of civil society applies also to Hobbes and Locke. In Hobbes, society is formed through the creation of the state which brings everyone and everything together into equal relations under the sovereign: 'This creation of a unitary space requires the absorption into the sovereign of the church and any other bodies that would threaten the unity of Leviathan.'⁸⁷ Cavanaugh finds the same tendency in Locke:

The "society" that Locke's state enacts is coterminous with the market, to which individuals come to contract for certain goods, both material and political. Locke's simplification of political space into the oscillation between individual rights and state sovereignty . . . relegates all other forms of common life—those based on biology, locality, common blood,

82. Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 77–78.

83. See, for example, William Stringfellow, *Conscience & Obedience: The Politics of Romans 13 and Revelation 13 in Light of the Second Coming* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

84. See Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, 330.

85. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 246.

86. See *ibid.*, 251.

87. See *ibid.*, 252.

common tasks, or common calling—to the status of the essentially private “voluntary society”.⁸⁸

In making this point, Cavanaugh targets the Catholic public theologian John Courtney Murray, who placed a strong emphasis on the distinction between state and civil society, with the state playing a rôle within society to provide certain goods, such as law and administration. This creates, or leaves open, public space in which civil society and the church can act to influence the state. Murray writes:

In general, ‘society’ signifies an area of freedom, personal and corporate, whereas ‘state’ signifies the area in which public powers may legitimately apply their coercive powers. To deny the distinction is to espouse the notion of government as totalitarian.⁸⁹

In demonizing the state, Cavanaugh denies this distinction, because liberal secular theory makes the society dependent on the state. This has huge implications for alternatives to the state’s politics and political redemption, which is discussed in Chapter 5. In Cavanaugh’s account, this creation of the state has two important effects for the church. First, it makes the church dependent on the state. Second, it makes the state the primary and sole political body, denying that the church is also a political body in its own right. But by affirming that the church can escape the grip of the state and be a political body causes the following problem for Cavanaugh: if the church can escape the state, why cannot other associations in civil society also be political bodies in their own right? What is so special about the church?

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In conclusion, Milbank and Cavanaugh stress the profane origins of the state to be found in selective historical narratives of its development. In their relating the origins of the state and violence, both Milbank and Cavanaugh echo Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘One would think that whoever took a glimpse into the origin of the state would henceforth seek his salvation only at a fearful distance from it: and where does one not see the monuments of that origin, ravaged countries, destroyed cities, brutalised people, consuming hatred of nations!’⁹⁰ A final assessment of their account of origins will be made in concluding this chapter. The remainder of this chapter will consider other theological and secular accounts of the origins of politics and the state, some describing the state as sacred, some profane.

88. See Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 254.

89. John Courtney Murray cited in William T. Cavanaugh, “Is Public Theology Really Public?: Some Problems with Civil Society,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21 (2001): 106.

90. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72.

The Politics of Creation in Christian Tradition

This section will look into the relationship of the origins of politics as found in Scripture and theological traditions. This will be important in how theology relates to the tension between the historical and ontological origins of the state.

The Politics of the Bible

Scripture contains no explicit mention of the creation of the state, but this has not prevented people looking there for the sacred or profane origins of the state. Searching here, instead of in secular thought, finds support in Robert Filmer, who writes of the ‘scandal’ that Christians ‘seek the original of government from the inventions or fictions of poets, orators, philosophers and heathen historians’ neglecting the Scriptures, ‘which have with more authority most particularly given us the true grounds and principles of government.’⁹¹ Despite Filmer’s encouragement, it has been more common for the political theologian to seek the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the civil powers in Scripture than to look there for their origin. But, as the following sections show, Scripture has much to say about the origins of government. Genesis is the main popular source here, with other texts from both testaments supplementing this to show how Scripture contains evidence for both sacred or profane views of the state.

The Genesis of the State according to the Bible

In the pursuit of origins, the book of Genesis has proved to have perennial prominence. Western culture still measures its alternative genealogies of many phenomena against Genesis, with the paradigmatic case being the apparent conflict between Genesis and Charles Darwin’s *Origins of the Species* on the origins of life.⁹² In the history of political thought, we also find that Genesis has played an important rôle in the political imagination, both in the legitimizing efforts of some and the overturning stories of others.

This fascination with Genesis is partly explained by the positive connection commonly held between antiquity and legitimacy. For this reason, a politics grounded in Genesis, which, because it describes the first events of human life, even if it is not the oldest book of the Bible, will have the greatest legitimacy of all. In explicating politics from Genesis, there are attempts to go back further in time than competing theories. So while some find the origins of the state in sin (Genesis 3), others see it in the dominion given to Adam (Genesis 1:28), still others find it in the creation of the

91. Sir Robert Filmer, “The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy,” in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133.

92. For Genesis as a yard-stick in Western culture see Ana M. Acosta, *Reading Genesis in the Long Eighteenth Century: From Milton to Mary Shelley* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

two lights (Genesis 1:16).⁹³ One can construct a doctrine of the sovereignty of God over all creation based in Genesis 1:1; this linking God's right to govern creation with God's creative acts (cf. Psalm 24:1–2). Exploring all these proposals is not possible here. The following paragraphs will explore a few that display, in turn, the sacred and profane origins of the state in Genesis.

In Reformed thought, the 'cultural mandate' of Genesis 1:28 is central to its understanding of the divine origins of politics. Min does not exaggerate when he writes: 'For the Reformational thinkers, the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 is the placenta of politics destined to reach other spheres of life.'⁹⁴ But the political importance of this text to the Reformed churches should not overshadow its importance in Catholicism. Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, for instance, sees in this verse the basis of the family as the 'true society' providing for a social space anterior to, and outside, the sovereignty of the state.⁹⁵

The search for origins in Genesis need not be positive; one can just as easily find profane politics in it. For many theologians, the notion of the Fall in Genesis has been the basis for the foundations of political problems as well as for political order. Martin Luther, as will be discussed below, grounded his theory of the state in the Fall, with the primary rôle of government being to 'hold sin in check.'⁹⁶

André Dumas also has a negative account of the origins of politics. Based on his reading of the Old Testament, Dumas finds the 'great political drama of the Old Testament,' as the 'continual conflicts between brothers.'⁹⁷ He writes, 'Human politics consists first in coming to terms with the fact that the brotherhood itself nourishes war.'⁹⁸ While, in support of his thesis, Dumas ranges over the entire biblical canon, others, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, find direct support for their negativity toward the state in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4.⁹⁹ Cavanaugh's main use of Cain's fratricide is that he sees it as part of the primordial splintering of humanity, out of which we require redemption.¹⁰⁰ He also links the murder of Abel by Cain with Cain's being the first city builder (Genesis 4:17), and the originator of political society.¹⁰¹ Milbank does this too, using the story of Cain and Abel (following

93. See Samuel Ajzenstat, "Liberal Democracy and the Biblical Account of Creation: Some Structural Analogies," in *Liberal Democracy and the Bible*, ed. Kim Ian Parker (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 19–37.

94. Min, *Sin and Politics*, 34.

95. Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," § 12.

96. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 1: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), 104.

97. André Dumas, *Political Theology and the Life of the Church*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1978), 32.

98. *Ibid.*, 35.

99. Figgis argues that Augustine traces the earthly city back to Cain. See Figgis, *Political Aspects*, 41.

100. Cavanaugh, "The City," 183, 184; "The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics," *Word and World* 22, no. 2 (2002): 176.

101. William T. Cavanaugh, "A World without Enemies: The Eucharist and the Work of Peace," *ABC Religion & Ethics*, September 18, 2012, <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/09/18/3592178.htm>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

Augustine) to show that the Earthly City is of profane origin.¹⁰²

Can political theology move from the ancient city to the modern state so easily? When talking about ancient political structures, it is customary to use the term ‘city’. That Milbank and Cavanaugh both do so provides support for the idea that they acknowledge continuity between theological reflection on the city and theological reflection on the state, despite affirming discontinuity between the ancient city and the modern state.¹⁰³ Milbank, in particular, speaks of the *polis* (Greek for ‘city’) when speaking of politics. The linkage between the city and other political structures (whether states or empires) is provided by Augustine in *De civitate Dei*, which has influenced theological reflection on politics ever since. His multivalence is considered fortunate by Augustine scholar Eugene TeSelle, who writes that *civitas* could mean people in general, a built city, the state or polity, or citizenship.¹⁰⁴ This multivalence is one reason why the ‘city’ has become an enduring symbol of human politics. Part of the problem with relating the city with the language of the ‘state’ is that there is no ancient word for the modern state, as Oliver O’Donovan notes.¹⁰⁵

Returning to the first biblical city, deriving the profanity of the state from Cain and Abel, as Milbank and Cavanaugh do, is questionable for several reasons. First, this perspective makes a firm link between Cain’s fratricide and the founding of politics. But instead of fratricide being the origins of the politics, it could be read that God’s preserving work in allowing Cain to procreate, and founding of the city of Enoch for his protection, was God’s providing for Cain’s survival.¹⁰⁶ Of the few church Fathers who commented on this passage, Nemesius of Emesa finds the city providing a means for expressing human sociability.¹⁰⁷ Given the range of interpretations of Cain’s city, urban theologian John Rogerson writes of the city that, ‘It exists by divine permission, permission granted to a person who had betrayed his brother and thus humanity. This is an ambiguity that runs like a constant thread through the biblical narratives that deal with cities.’¹⁰⁸ Second, Milbank and Cavanaugh, in linking Cain’s city with our states, would have us believe that there is continuity between the city of Cain and

102. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 394. Here the correct reference to Augustine’s discussion of Cain and Abel is Augustine, *City of God*, XV.1.

103. For examples of their uses of the ‘city’ trope see: Cavanaugh, “The City.”; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 382ff.

104. Eugene TeSelle, *Living in Two Cities: Augustinian Trajectories in Political Thought* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1998), 24–25.

105. The closest we can get is Greek’s *politeia* and Latin’s *civitas* and *respublica*. See Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 231.

106. This is how the story was read by Ambrose, “Cain and Abel,” in *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, vol. 42, *Fathers of the Church* (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 435.

107. Nemesius of Emesa, “A Treatise on the Nature of Man,” in *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, ed. William Telfer, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 243. Also see Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum*, trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 4.2.5, 4.3.12.

108. J. W. Rogerson, “The City in the Old Testament,” in *The City in Biblical Perspective*, by J. W. Rogerson and John Vincent (London: Equinox, 2009), 22.

the profane modern state, with the violence of Cain being somehow transmitted to the state. But, in general, Milbank and Cavanaugh tend toward seeing discontinuity between the ancient and modern forms of polity. Furthermore, a political imagination formed by Scripture would recognize that the biblical city was founded and protected by God (Psalm 48:8; Psalm 127:1), and those whom God is with, such as David (2 Samuel 5:9–10). The city is not only founded by God, but is also regularly faithful (Zechariah 8:3; Isaiah 1:21,26), holy (Isaiah 52:1), and the dwelling place of God (Psalm 46:4–5; Ezekiel 48:35). Third, it sets aside the meaning of the city in the redemption of humanity and the end of history. At the end of time, the New Jerusalem is promised to us, with redemption coming through the city of God.¹⁰⁹ For these three reasons, a clear link between fratricide and the profanity of the city and modern state is not therefore as clear cut as Milbank and Cavanaugh would make it appear.

In this brief survey of several political interpretations of Genesis, there are two main competing interpretations of where politics and the state come from. Some argue from Genesis that they are of divine origin, while others, using the same evidence, see them resulting from the murder and sin of humanity. Given these divergent opinions, Genesis provides no easy answers, therefore, in deciding whether the state is sacred or profane.

Prophecy and the Origins of Politics

Prophetic biblical literature also speaks to the divine ordering of politics. Especially challenging to contemporary secular justifications of the autonomous state are the 'Judgment-speeches to foreign nations'.¹¹⁰ That these ancient kings considered their own actions and political and military victories to be the sole source of their rule, places them as harbingers of modern rulers, as neither the Pharaohs nor our Prime Ministers consider themselves to be ruling under God. Walter Brueggemann is a rare guide to this prophetic literature, and considers the nations (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia) as partners to Yahweh.¹¹¹ Claims for independence are found within all these empires. In Isaiah, for instance, God punishes the arrogant boasting of the Assyrians whose King is full of pride in his autonomy:

For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found, like a nest, the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken, so I have

109. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 71.

110. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 95.

111. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, New ed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 492–527.

gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened its mouth, or chirped.” (Isaiah 10:13–14)

Commenting on this passage, Ellul asks, ‘Were these words really written in the seventh century B.C.? Do they not sum up the whole thinking of modern man?’¹¹² Ellul’s suggestion that the Bible speaks directly to today’s autonomous politics is reinforced by the book of Daniel.

Daniel 4 contains perhaps the most unambiguous account of the political sovereignty of God in scripture, with the statement that God is the source of political power repeated no fewer than four times. The ‘holy watcher’ in King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream affirms that ‘the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals’ (4:17). This is reaffirmed when Daniel interprets the dream (4:25). All this comes to pass as Nebuchadnezzar was driven into the wilderness (4:29–33). Finally, however, Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and finally affirms the sovereignty of God (4:34–37).

The biblical account of God’s sovereignty over political power clashes with modern politics based on secular rationalistic justifications that ignore any transcendent grounding. Brueggemann points out, in opposition to autonomous politics, that all nations sit under the Noachic covenant, since God makes a covenant with all the nations of the earth (Genesis 9:8–17).¹¹³ Some theologians, however, might argue that the modern state is something new and a definitive break with the past. Others, such as Brueggemann, make a firm link here between the witness of Israel and liberal politics:

Have we arrived at last at a nation-state that is finally immune to this witness of metapolitics, so that we came to a point in which Israel’s witness is seen to be outmoded or self-deceived rhetoric? . . . I imagine that this ancient witness would judge liberal autonomy to be nothing new, but one often and anciently utilized in the service of self-deceiving self-sufficiency.¹¹⁴

Prophetic literature contributes to the theological teaching that all political power comes from God, challenging any self-sufficient political system that has forgotten its relative position to the sovereignty of God. Prophecy speaks of the rule of God, reminding rulers of their dependence on God, even if they do not recognize Him. As Barth wrote, God ‘rules not only over the Church, but also over all creation, even if creation ignores it . . . Every man is under the dominion of Christ, whether he knows it or does not know it.’¹¹⁵ In light of this, the prophet not only proclaims justice and

112. Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 159–160.

113. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 494.

114. *Ibid.*, 527.

115. Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church: A commentary on the Apostle’s Creed according to Calvin’s Catechism*, ed. Jean-Louis Leuba, trans. Gabriel Vahanian (London: Collins, 1960), 94.

righteousness, but is also to ‘Say among the nations, “The LORD is king!”’ (Psalm 96:10). In the political imagination of Israel, this rule deabsolutizes or delegitimizes ‘all other governances that imagine that are unfettered and absolute.’¹¹⁶

Further Scriptures on Government

Most of the Scriptures discussed above allow the state positive biblical grounding. From a different standpoint, Christian anarchists also base their position in Scripture, which is predominantly the incompatibility of the state’s means with the positive teachings of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount.¹¹⁷ But there are two places where anarchists specifically locate the perverse origins of the state in Scripture: 1 Samuel 8 and in the temptations of Jesus.¹¹⁸

In 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel petition Samuel for a king to govern them so they can be ‘like other nations’ (8:4–5). Despite Samuel’s warning about the evils that a king would bring, the people insisted on having a king. This could be considered an example of *libido regnandi* instead of the *libido dominandi* that Augustine saw as the foundation of the state.¹¹⁹ God finally relents, giving them their king. Anarchists see two evils here: the list of crimes of the state that Samuel lists (8:11–18), and the rejection of the rule of God (8:7). This verse would then seem to justify judging the state as profane. But even someone as sympathetic to anarchism as Ellul cautions against this conclusion. As he observes, by demanding a monarch the Israelites made a ‘human error’, but one God allows his people to make. Eventually, after the failure of Saul, God ‘uses the error and disobedience of his people, and integrates it into his plan, so that David is not just the ancestor of Jesus Christ, but also the one who imitates his kingship.’¹²⁰ By endorsing the freedom of God to use human mistakes for good, Ellul undercuts those, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, who stop with the profane origins of the state without investigating God’s further purposes for it.

While not a direct statement on the createdness of rule, the temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Matthew 4:8–10; Luke 4:5–8) has been used to show both the profanity of rule, and its sacred origin. Matthew 4:8–10 reads: ‘Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”’ Important in interpreting this text is one’s opinion of Satan’s reliability in claiming that he can grant political power to whomsoever he pleases. Ellul believes

116. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 239, 492–493.

117. Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 43–82.

118. *Ibid.*, 84–88, 92–95.

119. See Yoram Hazony, *The Dawn: Political Teachings of the Book of Esther*, Rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2000), 265n7.

120. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1976), 171.

that the devil tells the truth, partly because his word is not challenged by Jesus.¹²¹ As a result, Ellul's conclusion is that worldly power is demonic.¹²² Another view is that, since the Devil is a liar, power is not his to distribute at all.¹²³

The texts discussed above show that Scripture speaks to the origins of political power, but not in a univocal way. On the basis of Genesis, the origins of politics and the state can be either grounded positively, in God's creation of a social humanity, or negatively, in humanity's fallenness and desire to be ruled. But whichever view is favoured, there remains common agreement that, and as the biblical account shows, political sovereignty is God's to dispense. This is further confirmed within Christian theological traditions' reflections on the origins of politics and the state, which is the subject of the next section. It should be noted here that Scripture does not describe the historical origins of particular states or systems of political organization, but merely provides a perspective on the ultimate grounding of political power.

The State's Origins According to Christian Doctrine

The foregoing biblical material feeds directly into traditional theologies of the state. This section offers a brief account of how the state's origins have been considered by some major theological traditions in the restraint of sin and the promotion of the good.

The Restraint of Sin

The predominant theological position on the ontological origin of the state is to identify it as God's *ordinance* for the restraint of sin following humanity's fall (Romans 13:1 in the KJV reads in part 'For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.'). Because the provision of the state by God for this purpose is usually viewed as a providential act of God, this restraining function of the state will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter; here the focus is on its origins. Does describing the state as God's ordinance to restrain sin mean that God *created* the state? The answer here will depend on one's definition of the verb 'to ordain', which can mean both 'to cause to be made' and 'to arrange'. In the former, God would be creating the state, albeit through human actions. In the latter, God would be arranging and using the politics of humans for divine purposes. The difference between the two lies in whether God has an immediate relationship with the state, or a mediated one, a distinction that will be discussed further below. This section will show how some

121. Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 58.

122. Ibid., 58. Also see Pope Gregory VII, "Letter 8.21 (to Hermann of Metz)," in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100–1625*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, trans. Ephraim Emerton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 245.

123. This is the view of Irenaeus of Lyon, "Against Heresies," in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100–1625*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 16.

theologians, from the Fathers onward, link the origins of the state in God's ordaining it to restrain sin.

While Augustine does not go into detail about the origins of the state, he does find the origins of politics related to the notion of the Fall.¹²⁴ Consistent with this view, he sees that, 'Without the slightest doubt, the kingdoms of men are established by divine providence.'¹²⁵ For this reason, Augustine's politics will be considered in more detail in the next chapter on preservation. Here we observe that Augustine famously speaks of two cities being created by two loves: one by the love of God, and the other by humanity's self-love.¹²⁶ The earthly city is founded in the domination in the heart of people to dominate others. As already seen, this analysis has been adopted by Milbank and Cavanaugh as providing a foundation for the separation of the political church (*civitas Dei*) and the profane state (*civitas terrena* or *civitas diaboli*). The further discussion on Augustine below will show that, while it is sin that is the origin of the earthly city, the civil authorities are used providentially for the good of the restraint of sin.

Luther also grounds government in sin and fallen humanity, arguing that before the Fall no state was needed. In his commentary on Genesis 2:16,17, he remarks that:

Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature . . . Therefore if men had not become evil through sin, there would have been no need of civil government; but Adam, together with his descendants, would have lived in utmost serenity and would have achieved more by moving one finger than all the swords, instruments of torture, and axes can achieve now. At that time there would have been no robber, murderer, thief, envier, and liar. What need, therefore, would there have been of laws and of civil government, which is like a cauterizing iron and an awful remedy by which harmful limbs are cut off that the rest may be preserved?¹²⁷

So, even though Luther finds biblical justification for government in Genesis, he does not place it in the realm of creation, but as a remedy for sin, with the aim of preserving society. Note that this remedy is not redemptive, but merely a remedy which enables human beings to live together without the full effects of sin being unleashed upon one another. Luther's locating of the state in God's interim remedy for human sinfulness makes the state a provision of God necessary for the preservation of people. In this task, it must maintain a level of force and use it against the wrongdoer

124. See discussion at Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 197–198.

125. Augustine, *City of God*, V.1.

126. *Ibid.*, XIV.28.

127. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1–5, 104.

in order to *preserve* the community as a whole. This is so essential to Luther that humans must obey the state as if they were obeying God.¹²⁸

Anabaptists agree with Luther that the state, even with its origins in the restraint of sin, can be used for good, but they are more interested in the state as an agent of God's providence than having its origins associated with God, for this helps to ameliorate the problem of the violent means the state uses, but also the violence of its origins. Yoder writes: 'God does not say, "I want the sword and the state, so I hereby decree that there shall be a state." There is no divine act of instituting . . . God does not create the sword. God does not make oppression, but somehow God uses it and disposes it.'¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Yoder, like Cavanaugh, holds a bellicist position, locating the origins of the state in violence: 'for there is no regime whose beginnings was not either revolution or conquest.'¹³⁰ Yet there is this mystery, which this perspectives generates: 'How God can use that which is pagan, indeed that which is demonic, without affirming it, is something that human understanding cannot completely grasp.'¹³¹

Together with an anthropology of human depravity, holding the state to be God's ordinance for the restraint of sin risks sanctifying the state. This is because our gratitude for the restraint of sin that the state provides will be directly proportional to our understanding of the depth of human sinfulness. In other words, the more depraved and sinful humans are assumed to be, the more the state is upheld as a necessity for the preservation of society. The risk here is that this necessity becomes divorced from its theological anthropology and becomes a self-justifying presumption of the state.

Government for the Good

Some theologians think that understanding the state as something which finds its warrant in sin is too negative and emphasizes the coercive nature of the state. According to Michael Long, this view was held by Martin Luther King, Jr., who, in wanting to emphasize more than the coercive nature of government, split with Luther's basis for the state in human sinfulness.¹³² King understood that to call on the government to concern itself with positive functions, such as the provision of social welfare, 'called for an ontological grounding of the state in human sociality, in the relatedness between human persons, or in something similarly positive.'¹³³ Such an ontological grounding can be found in the medieval position that one could locate

128. See among many sources, Luther's commentary on Ecclesiastes 8:2 in *Luther's Works, Volume 15: Notes on Ecclesiastes; Lectures on the Song of Songs; Treatise on the Last Words of David*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, Ian Siggins, and Martin H. Bertram (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), 135.

129. Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 177.

130. John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 43.

131. John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 20.

132. See Long, *Against Us, But For Us*, 120–122.

133. See *Ibid.*, 122.

the origins of human politics and the state in the created social nature of humans.¹³⁴ Aquinas developed this position in his theological appropriation of Aristotle.

In *De regimine principum*, Aquinas outlines 'both the origin of a kingdom and what pertains to the king's office.'¹³⁵ In doing so, Aquinas relies on Aristotle's *Politics*, and especially the basing of the state in humanity's social nature.¹³⁶ Aquinas supports this perspective with Ecclesiastes 4:9: 'Two are better than one, because they have the reward of mutual companionship.'¹³⁷ He also cites Proverbs 11:14 for the purpose of showing how political rule is the means to make community life possible. So, for Aquinas, the ruler is tasked with promoting the common life and therefore the common good of society, and should not allow society to dissolve by permitting everyone to follow their own goods.¹³⁸ Because the priestly office has the knowledge of the end of the community, it has a duty to guide and steer the kingly office toward its true end. This notion opens up the way for statecraft, or the church trying to influence the state, for as Aquinas says: 'If, therefore, as we have said, he who is responsible for a final end must govern those who are responsible for the things directed towards that end and must direct them by his command, it is clear that the king, just as he must be subject to the lordship and governance administered by the priestly office, must rule over all human occupations and direct them by his own command and rule.'¹³⁹

Calvin's position was that God ordained the magistracy. His evidence for this is the high names given to rulers in Scripture (Exodus 22:8; Psalm 82:1,6 as interpreted through John 10:35).¹⁴⁰ His position is that 'it has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinance.'¹⁴¹ Calvin also finds rulership a gift of God (based on Romans 12:8), and finds in Romans 13 a summary statement of civil power as an 'ordinance of God.'¹⁴² Why, according to Calvin, did God ordain rulership? His answer is consistent with the end of humanity: in order to worship God.¹⁴³ He also writes that Christian kings should see themselves as ministers of God, and in this office placed under his overall rule, and owing due reverence to God (here Calvin cites Psalm 2:10–12).¹⁴⁴

134. See Ewart Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 146.

135. Aquinas, "De regimine principum," 5.

136. For Aristotle it is axiomatic that the 'state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.' Aristotle, "The Politics," 1253a2.

137. Aquinas, "De regimine principum," 6. Dyson's translation of Scripture.

138. *Ibid.*, 7.

139. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

140. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.4; John Calvin, *Instruction in Faith*, 1537, ed. and trans., with a foreword by Paul T. Fuhrmann (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 76. A similar approach was adopted by Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 14: Selected Psalms III*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, Ian Siggins, and Martin H. Bertram (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), 14–15.

141. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.4.

142. *Ibid.*, 4.20.4.

143. *Ibid.*, 4.20.4.

144. *Ibid.*, 4.20.4.

This view, that God ordains rule and even rulers, has sometimes led to the belief that systems of government, or even individual rulers or particular governments, have been raised up by God. This found its most pointed expression, and was most abused, by those who viewed the state as an order of creation.

The State as an Order of Creation

Locating the state in the order of creation (*Schöpfungsordnung*) is the view the God's creative act instituted human politics and the state. Because this gives an ontological warrant for the political powers that exist, locating the state in the order of creation remains controversial because of the link that has sometimes been made between God's creative act and particular governments, as if God has placed certain people in power. Such a view is treated as a conservative theological position that provides legitimacy to the present rulers, and sacralizes the present order. Some German theologians who took this position in the early twentieth century were heavily criticized by Barth¹⁴⁵ and Bonhoeffer.¹⁴⁶ Barth and Bonhoeffer offered a partial corrective to such a theology of culture in the direction of preservation and redemption, topics to be covered in the following chapters. Nevertheless, defining the state as an order of creation has had prominent adherents and is still making converts. This section discusses the abuses of this view, and how viewing the state as an order of creation can make the state profane.

A representative of this view was Emil Brunner. Brunner places the state in the order of creation because humans are created as political beings. Here he follows Aristotle and Althusius.¹⁴⁷ The social nature of men and women finds fulfilment firstly in the family and then in larger associations, culminating in the state, which is 'only the last link in the chain of these associations.'¹⁴⁸ A similar anthropology is implicit in underpinning political pluralism.¹⁴⁹ The order is important, as the family and other associations are served by the state and they exist in a near zero-sum relationship when it comes to the rôle and foundations of the different orders of creation. So, 'The more families and communities fail to do, the more the State must do', and a centralized state becomes a 'substitute for the lost community of the people.'¹⁵⁰ Writing in 1945, Brunner was particularly concerned with the totalitarian

145. See Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 243–244, 518; Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 171. Also see page 160 below.

146. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. Martin Ruter, Ilse Todt, and John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 139–140. Also see page 120 below.

147. Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, 122, 244n48. See Aristotle, "The Eudemian Ethics," in *The Athenian Constitution; The Eudemian Ethics; On Virtues and Vices*, 3rd ed., trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1952), 1242a5–10; Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 17–18, 24–25.

148. Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, 123.

149. See John Neville Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1913), 92.

150. Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, 124.

state, which, in a statement that anticipates Milbank's analysis, 'grew gradually out of the modern conception of the sovereignty of the State and the breakdown of individuals and communities', he finds the 'deepest cause of that failure' in the 'atrophy of the Christian substance.'¹⁵¹ Brunner's state is therefore in the order of creation in so far as it coheres with his anthropology and the will of God for human unity in associations.¹⁵² But he does not baptise the origins of actual states, recognizing that states come about through compulsion and violence, and that this is not willed by God.¹⁵³ To Brunner, the Christian should accept the existence of the state in gratitude for the peace and order it provides, while also recognising that, 'Over every State there broods something of the light of the divine creation and a heavy cloud of anti-divine forces.'¹⁵⁴

More recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in creation theology. Gordon McConville has recently suggested that the recovery of creation theology offers fresh possibilities for an Old Testament political theology. He notes that the loss of creation theology, 'had entailed a disjunction between the faith of the Old Testament and ordinary processes of life.'¹⁵⁵ If the state as an order of creation is making a comeback, it has also brought the well-known dangers of creation theology with it. The context of the German church struggle, of which Barth and Bonhoeffer were part, has shaped the reception of creation theology ever since.¹⁵⁶ Since the time of Barth's rejection of natural theology, Brueggemann has been a leading critic of its adoption in political theology. While he has reservedly welcomed the return of creation theology, and has usefully catalogued the main instigators of its recovery, he remains wary of its ideological misuse.¹⁵⁷ In Brueggemann's opinion, accounts of origins and creation serve to establish and legitimate order. He writes:

The social function of creation theology . . . is characteristically to establish, legitimate, and advocate order at the cost of transformation. It is of course reassuring to claim that God's good order of creation is a sure decree against chaos. The problem is that regularly (I believe inevitably), creation theology is allied with the king, with the royal liturgy, and therefore with reasons of state.¹⁵⁸

151. Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, 124.

152. Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1937), 444–445.

153. *Ibid.*, 444–445.

154. *Ibid.*, 446.

155. McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 31.

156. See Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53, no. 2 (1996): 177–190 and also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 163.

157. See *ibid.*, 159–163.

158. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 101.

Brueggemann's concern is not only supported by twentieth century abuses. The ideological use of political origins stories was a feature of Plato's 'myth of the metals' and *Timaeus*.¹⁵⁹

That there is potential for abuse of natural theology is acknowledged by its advocates. Brunner, for instance, partially accepts Barth's criticism, but argues that there are two possible ways of using natural theology: one being conservative and authoritarian, and the other – which he favours – as a 'refracted' concept of order.¹⁶⁰ Brunner's defence is simply that our ethos determines the outcome of our natural theology, not the other way around, thus denying the inevitability of natural theology being conservative. Whereas for Barth natural theology was a denominator, determining all else, for Brunner it is a numerator, which takes on the character of the underlying theology. In either mode there is a risk that the state, by being described as an order of creation, is valued as the immediate creation of God as it currently exists. If such a view is adopted by the church, then it can only accept the state passively, and perhaps attempt to make it work for the good.

More generally, and from a creational perspective, having God as the creator of a 'very good' Creation (Genesis 1:31), denies the positive ontology of evil, seeing it instead as a privation of this good creation. This in turn calls into question social and political thinking that grounds politics in a basic foundation conflict between good and evil as primeval realities. This point is proclaimed by liberation theologian Pedro Trigo: 'To profess that our God is the creator of heaven and earth, then, means denying a sacred foundation to that which enslaves and subjects the world today.'¹⁶¹ At this general level there can be found implicit social ethics in Genesis.

This doctrinal survey emphasizes the connection between theological anthropology (a social, but fallen humanity) and the perceived need for politics and the state to provide for organized sociality and the restraint of sin. Such a focus is largely absent from Milbank and Cavanaugh. They have emphasized the sins of the state, but not of humans. This deficiency – surprising in *theological* politics – may result from their lack of engagement with the traditional Scriptures and confessions dealing with the state.

On the one hand, Scripture and doctrine can be used to support the conclusion that the state is profane. On the other hand, the state, understood as existing as an order of creation and an immediate work of God, can become sacred. But whatever the state's origins, even profane ones, the tradition affirms the freedom of God to allow the state

159. The myth of the metals is in Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 414e–417b; Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), xiv–xv.

160. Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology*, by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 51. Brunner also defends himself against Reinhold Niebuhr in "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 350.

161. Pedro Trigo, *Creation and History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1992), xvii. This is also the message of Milbank's affirmation of the ontological priority of peace over the ontology of violence; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 367, 440.

to work for the benefit of humankind. In this more nuanced way, the state can be understood as mundane.

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On Types of Origins and the Politics of Creation

So far, this chapter has looked into how Milbank and Cavanaugh perceive the origins of the secular state and how the origin of the state is accounted for in theological traditions. In the case of Milbank, the state's absolute sovereignty comes from the rise of the secular as a realm separated from God. For Cavanaugh, the state is effectively the Antichrist, born in violence and working in opposition to Christ in offering a competing soteriology. For them, modern secular political life is based in violence and therefore cannot be a creation of God, but merely the product of sinful human will. This makes their political theology appear incommensurable with biblical and theological accounts of the rise of the state that sees God at work in and with political power.

In assessing their position, it is important to observe that Milbank and Cavanaugh rely almost exclusively on historical accounts of the rise of the state. In this way, their approach fits within modern historical consciousness by locating the (il)legitimacy of the state in its historical origins. But even here, they stick more to accounts of conflict and war at the origins of the state and ignore other accounts. Other sociological, anthropological, and historical accounts of the rise of the modern state give more credence to factors where the state developed as a force for meeting the changing and growing needs of the citizens. Recognising, or even emphasizing, these other factors does not make the state into an idol.

Another reason for the popularity of historical accounts of the rise of the state is the decline of the Biblical narrative in Western society. Theological accounts of the origins of political power and the state have been set aside in favour of secular accounts, where we typically find either social-scientific or philosophical accounts of the origins of the state. This risks making the state sacred by being a self-generating object, without any relationship to God. As Karl Marx wrote: 'A *being* only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his *existence* to himself.'¹⁶² So, to be free, as in modernity, requires that human institutions are understood as being humanly created, made by human hands and will. This notion, that the state comes from human freedom and can be freely shaped for human ends, is at the root of the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke,

162. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works Volume 3: Marx and Engels: 1843–44*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ed. Maria Shcheglova et al., trans. Martin Milligan and Dirk J. Struik, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 304. Marx's italics.

and Rousseau. In secular thought, government and politics are human inventions and have nothing to do with God's creation.

Despite their differences, secular and Christian theories of origins of the state fulfil a similar human need. Origin stories, of whatever kind, help us make sense of, and locate us within, the world. Without a Christian story of origins, the church will be tempted to baptize a secular story of political origins, even if only implicitly. Such a secular politics recognizes no transcendent basis for founding, evaluating, or guiding political institutions. At this point, having surrendered a story of political origins, the church finds it increasingly difficult to have a way of speaking into politics, having been sidelined from the outset. Another way to put this is that the church, in conceding the story of the origins of politics and the state to secular thought, has also conceded to secularism the right to write the rules of engagement in the political sphere.

Stories of origins are not only categorized by religious or secular categories, they can also reveal deep ideological commitments. Lest one think that the quest for origins is a dispassionate task guided by objective values for the truth, Karen L. King suggests that talk about beginnings is never neutral, but reveals ideological positions: 'Historically, to talk about beginnings is rather a way to talk about change; since historical beginnings are always *in media res*, they are always instances of change, not absolute, pure, or essential origins.'¹⁶³ For this reason, those who talk about the state's origins, or those who emphasize its discontinuity with what has gone before, may be aiming to posit a new beginning to support their argument, either in favour of the secular state, which is discontinuous with the medieval system of government, or to say that this new form of government rests solely upon the errors of modernity. Applying King's point to Milbank and Cavanaugh, we find that they chose their particular points of origins of the state where they see the most important *change*. In the case of Milbank, the origins of the state are narrated through a deviant form of ontology. He is primarily concerned with the modern state as a material expression of deficient philosophy. His idealism sees the changes that brought about the state in the realm of ideas and the manifestation of the modern state and market as reflecting this reality. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, narrates the important changes in the material consideration of the wars of religion, where dramatic social change saw the emergence of the modern state. But what purposes do these narratives serve? King suggests that we approach historical narratives with a hermeneutics of suspicion:

Historical narrative . . . authorizes particular constructions of power and reality (the nature of humanity and the world), places the reader at a

163. Karen L. King, "Mackinations on Myth and Origins," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 163.

particular place in the story, and distinguishes truth from falsehood by telling things the way they really were — and thus really are.¹⁶⁴

Extending King's point to the history of the origins of the state, we can say that an author's starting point in such an account designates that point from which they can write history as if intervening history has not really changed things. Another way of putting this is that one's departure point becomes historically flattening by asserting continuity between the present and one's chosen historical starting point. In their narrations of the origins of the state, we see how for Cavanaugh little has changed since the wars of religion, and with Milbank we still live in the direct political legacy of Scotus's philosophy and Hobbes's voluntarism and nominalism.

Origins not only highlight change, for Ana Acosta they also provide an insight into the agenda of those posing them. In discussing Rousseau, she suggests that the 'Origin Is the Goal'.¹⁶⁵ What she means by this offers a further methodological clue to origins writings, including those of Milbank and Cavanaugh. Her position is that, generally speaking, in writings of origins, we enter into a dialectic of origin and goal: 'the desired future can be attained only by returning to, and hence redefining, the beginning.'¹⁶⁶ And for Rousseau specifically, Acosta writes: 'Creating an origin enables Rousseau to create a fiction that allows him to reach the one he is really after: the utopian goal.'¹⁶⁷ We have already seen how Milbank and Cavanaugh locate the origins of the state where they see that things went awry. By telling their stories of origins of the state they are able to pose a view of the future that looks like a better past. Therefore their histories are as much about how we recover a more satisfactory future, as much as they are about describing what went wrong.

The insights of King and Acosta combine to highlight how, in a teleological fashion, Milbank and Cavanaugh start with the secularism and nihilism of the profane state, and then write their narrations of the state *to* this position from their chosen starting points. They do not start where the origin *is*, but where they find a congenial change point in history from which they can launch their critique of the state. It is hardly surprising, then, that they offer a selective history of the rise of the state with little theological engagement. While this prevents their falling prey to the error of sanctifying the state in its origins and making it sacred, they err at the other extreme: writing a narrative of the descent of politics into the profanity of the modern state, completely separated from the creative force of God or his power to mitigate the worst of humanity's profane politics and bring good out of it.

By contrast to this historical approach to origins, patristic and medieval thought often sought the legitimacy of the state outside of history in doctrine and scripture. For

164. King, "Reimagining Christian Origins," 158–159.

165. See Chapter 1 of Acosta, *Reading Genesis*. See p. 96 for how her analysis applies to Rousseau.

166. *Ibid.*, 17.

167. *Ibid.*, 96.

this reason, scripture and tradition, while of continued interest in framing questions of legitimacy and obedience, do not trouble the historian of the state.¹⁶⁸ The apparent conflict between these two perspectives echoes a famous medieval dispute. Pope Gregory VII asks: 'Who may not know that kings and dukes have had their origin from those who, being ignorant of God, by pride, rapines, treachery, murders—at length by practically all crimes whatsoever, with the devil, the prince of the world, indeed urging them on, have presumed by blind greed and insupportable presumption to lord it over their equals, namely men?'¹⁶⁹ Gregory was answered directly by the Benedictine monk Hugh of Fleury: 'How foolish this opinion is is evident by the teaching of the Apostle, who says, "There is no power but of God. For the powers that be are ordained of God" [Romans 13:4]. Therefore by this statement it is certain that the royal authority on earth was ordained or disposed on earth not by men, but by God.'¹⁷⁰ While it may appear that this discussion is one where the participants are talking at cross purposes, at dispute is the difference between the historical and the ontological origins of the state. In emphasizing the historical origins, Milbank and Cavanaugh downplay the possibility that God may be involved in originating the political authorities we have. One result of doing is that it allows the state to be more easily portrayed as profane.

In the medieval period, the final divine origin of authority was taken for granted. A more important dispute was whether rule came from God in an immediate or a mediate fashion. Adopting a mediated view, that God works through the structures established by sinful humans, we might conclude that the historical origins of the state are not very interesting, because whatever these origins, God can use the state for his purposes.¹⁷¹ The modern state may not have been directly created by God, but the absence of any appreciation of the createdness of human government in Milbank and Cavanaugh, rules out for them even a mediated interest of God in the state. So the rise of the modern state exists for them completely separate from God's work and in discontinuity with other political systems which preceded it.

With a mediated view of the state, the historical and biblical-theological views on the origins of power are not incompatible. Joseph de Maistre, in his study of sovereignty, offers a way of reconciling the rôle of humanity and the rôle of God in making the state. The place of humans in making the state through their own will and actions is undeniable. But theology cannot allow this fact of human action to disallow the view that God is involved in the creation of politics and direction of the state. As de Maistre writes:

168. Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, vol. 1, 140.

169. Pope Gregory VII, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085: An English Translation*, ed. and trans. H. E. J. Cowdrey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.21.

170. Hugh of Fleury, *Tractatus de Regia Potestate et Sacerdotali Dignitate*, I.1; in Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, vol. 1, 166. Also see on this dispute Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, 109n16.

171. See Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, vol. 1, 158.

Since God has not thought it appropriate to use super-natural agents in the establishment of states, it is certain that all developments have come about through human agencies. But saying that sovereignty does not derive from God because he has made use of men to establish it is like saying that he is not the creator of man because we all have a father and mother.¹⁷²

De Maistre was right to see how some, in accounting for the origins of the state, focus on profane human means and actions, without seeing the divine permission for what is made by human hands. This coheres well with the view that, while the state is not a direct creation of God, it is something that God uses for his purposes in governing the world. This view will be further developed in the next chapter on God's preservation of human society.

This chapter has also demonstrated that Milbank and Cavanaugh lack serious engagement with scripture and tradition with respect to the state's origins. Scripture and tradition teach that all political power comes from God, even if the state is not one of His creatures. Milbank and Cavanaugh maintain a distance from these theological accounts, symptomatic of their lack of serious engagement with scripture (the reasons for this are discussed further on page 175). One reason scripture is unimportant for Milbank and Cavanaugh may be the apparently ahistorical nature of biblical reflections on the state. An illustration of this sort of complaint can be found in Arne Rasmusson's criticisms of Barth's unmediated biblical view of the state.¹⁷³ Rasmusson is critical of Barth for lacking a thick description of historically contingent realities and allowing his times to influence his apparently neutral exegesis. In the same way, Milbank and Cavanaugh would likely argue that modern theologians can hardly address scripture without their resultant interpretations being influenced by the state's modern *mythos*. But this criticism of biblical interpretation merely shifts the locus of authority from the Bible to history, thereby valuing historical method over the use of Scripture. But, as seen above, Scripture and history ask different questions about the state. Traditionally, Scripture was used to question the legitimacy of states, not their historical origins. This priority should make the political theologian seeking origins question the demand for thick historical description.

Rasmusson's criticism is evasive, and does not fully recognize the political theologian's task of grappling with both history and theology in understanding the state. Instead of trying to relate scripture and doctrine to the state, together with its specific history, it is easier to adopt the approach of Milbank and Cavanaugh in seeing to the origins of the state in profane human history, which is directed by the

172. Joseph de Maistre, *The Works of Joseph de Maistre*, ed. and trans. Jack Lively (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 94.

173. Arne Rasmusson, "The Politics of Diaspora: The Post-Christendom Theologies of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hütter, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 101–103.

sinful human will. But, as we have seen, this historical or genealogical methodology is plagued with difficulties.

Conclusions

This chapter began a three-fold investigation into how the state may be considered profane according to Milbank and Cavanaugh. Here, through considering the doctrine of creation and the origins of the state, we find one way in which they consider the state to be profane.

In conclusion, we find a difference between historical and ontological accounts of the state. Milbank and Cavanaugh have selective accounts of the descent of the state from the rise of the secular and from the wars of religion. While both these sources have their place in Christian reflections on the origins of the state, theology is more concerned with the ontological origins of human politics and the state in God. By focussing on the state's history, which has many dark moments, this theological point may be missed, and the state may be too easily described as profane. On the other hand, we must temper the possible harm that could be caused by treating uncritically the notion that God ordains not the state, but each and every government. The balanced view is that the state is mundane, without great importance placed on where it came from, and more attention paid to reflecting on how God may ordain and use the political creations of humans in his work. To maintain the position that the state is merely mundane, it need not have profane or sacred origins. But placing the state in the order of creation will not do. This, as history has shown, has been a dangerous move to make, with inherent risks that the state and present government can be sacralized as the immediate creation of God. But in rejecting this position, care must be taken not to suggest that God is divorced from working through the state in ordering human life.

In considering God's work in relation to politics, we cannot rest content with creation and origins. What is created must be preserved. And so the next chapter will move beyond origins into a discussion of the relationship of God's work of preserving creation and the relationship of this work to politics.

Chapter 4

Preservation and the Order of the State

Origins alone can never fully explain the state, since explanations of origins do not exhaust its meaning, function, or direction. Aristotle, for instance, writes that the *polis* comes into existence to meet our bare necessities, but remains in existence for the sake of living well.¹ For some Christians, the state exists in the order of preservation, acting as a means of God's providence in sustaining human society. This chapter outlines the origins of the doctrine of preservation as found in scripture and the early church's recognition of the need for this doctrine, given what it experienced as the delay of the *parousia*. While theology affirms the preservation of the whole of creation, the focus here will be on God's sustenance of humanity as individuals, and, more importantly here, on the preservation of human societies by political means, including the state.

As shown below, the doctrine of preservation is largely absent from the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh. This is a weakness, partially explained through the inherent tension between the theological doctrines of preservation and eschatology. Furthermore, because Milbank and Cavanaugh treat the state as profane, they fail to see the preserving rôle of the state in providing temporal goods for the sustaining of human community.

Superficially, it is perhaps more difficult to make a case that the sustaining function of the modern state is idolatrous, especially since the state is often held to derive its legitimacy from its origins or its redemptive work. But, insofar as the state exists merely to preserve and protect in secular liberal politics, without it preserving society for anything other than its self-perpetuation, then this preservative function risks being absolutized as the sole purpose of the state. This focus on the preserving rôle of the state in secular political theory, which knows no end beyond the self-generating egoist end of the individual, risks making an idol of the goal of preserving society and the state as a preserving agent. Such a move is in direct conflict with Christianity's

1. Aristotle, "The Politics," 1252b29.

teleology that teaches the movement of all things toward God. But even within the discipline of theology, preservation is often overlooked as a serious theological doctrine, both by those who believe that redemption is imminent, and by those who hold to a realized eschatology that compresses ordinary time between the fall and redemption.²

A link could be made here between human society and the scientific understanding of the upholding of the universe, which does not collapse in on itself. Christian theology affirms that God both created and sustains Creation, and that without God's preserving work, the universe would cease to be. Others believe that the universe (however it came into being) is simply upheld by natural life-sustaining forces autonomous from God. An analogy can be made here with the modern understanding of society and the state. Statist thought affirms the notion that if society is not preserved by the autonomous state then we shall return to the chaos of the Hobbes's state of nature, where life is nasty, brutish, and short. What do Christians believe here? Does theology teach a form of political Deism whereby God is equally removed from the ongoing governance of the human society, while also affirming his active work in sustaining Creation in general? Or, do Christians believe that just as with Creation in general, God plays a part in sustaining society either immediately or mediately through the state? It has become tempting for Christianity to believe that we can hold to both the ongoing direct preservation of Creation by God, and the sustaining of society by an autonomous secular state without any need to explain why God is actively involved in one but not the other. In other words, theology appears to affirm that God looks after Creation in general, while human agency makes and preserves our political instruments, without concurrence between the two wills. If this assessment is correct, then theology indirectly allows the preserving autonomous state to be made into an idol with the powers of preservation. On the other hand, Christian theology may teach that God may use the state to preserve society in a more direct way. Still others see the state as a barrier to preservation, affirming that God preserves society without reference to the state at all, perhaps through the church.

Christian accounts of preservation differ from secular ones, in the means used in preserving society, what society is preserved against, and what it is preserved for. This final point is critical, since in secular thought the means of preservation risk becoming, without a *telos*, an end in themselves. Theology rejects this view in affirming that creation is preserved for redemption, the subject of Chapter 5.

2. Irenaeus has been accused of making this mistake by Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Revised, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 57, 196–197.

The Politics of Preservation in Milbank and Cavanaugh

This chapter will follow the format of the previous one, in considering the thoughts of Milbank and Cavanaugh and their views of the doctrine of preservation before considering the biblical and doctrinal background to the Christian doctrine of preservation.

Milbank and Political Providence

Some critics think Milbank has no political doctrine of providence. In this vein, consider Stephen Webb's judgment of Milbank:

Milbank . . . has no providential interpretation of how democratic nation-states have preserved the common goods of sinful humanity by providing political order and stability. Like radical Protestants who think the Holy Spirit left the church after the triumph of Constantine, only to return with the Anabaptists, Milbank thinks God withdrew his hand from political affairs with the rise of modern nation-states and will return to history only when they are replaced by some form of global Christian socialism. Democracy is a blank on Milbank's providential slate.³

This section assesses whether it is a just assessment of Milbank by outlining and examining his doctrine of preservation.

In the first chapter of *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank discusses the 'New Science of Politics', which he says was 'concerned with creation, or the institution of a new, secular space' from absolute beginnings, as, for instance, found in Hobbes.⁴ Then, in chapter two, Milbank moves on to consider political economy, which was concerned with 'providence or a process of prudent conservation'.⁵ Does this mean that Milbank believes that the new politics does not have a means of preserving what was created, instead delegating this function to economics? In his discussion, Milbank finds the political economists, such as Adam Smith, seeking to find a guiding hand in the selfish workings of individual economic subjects: 'God, or "providence" or "nature", is the Machiavellian sovereign who weaves long-term benefits out of short-term interests and individual discomfitures.'⁶ Milbank's consideration of the secular forms of providence are contrasted, but only in passing, with 'the traditional providence of Catholic orthodoxy'.⁷ He writes that, 'Physical sciences have their rationale in the conservation of the physical body, human sciences in the conservation

3. Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 78. Also see Stephen H. Webb, "From Prudentius to President Bush: Providence, Empire and Paranoia," in *The Providence of God*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 231–254.

4. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 27.

5. Ibid., 26. Milbank's italics.

6. Milbank, "Thomistic Telescope," 38.

7. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 28.

of the social body.’⁸ Milbank complains that, in political economy, providence has become an amoral force for the preservation of the secular: ‘it imagined and helped to construct an amoral formal mechanism which allows not merely the institution but also the preservation and the regulation of the secular.’⁹

Preservation, then, seems to be a problematic part of modern secular thought. This is borne out in Milbank’s analysis of our modern political life. His view is that in modernity, the secular dictates to the church and its disciplines of theology a limited rôle in society. It follows from this that the Christian doctrine of providence, formerly linked to history, is excluded:

Within the bounds laid down by the state, theology is instead confined to upholding a supposedly universal morality and to better scholarly establishment of the facts which are taken to ground belief. Thus theology in the course of the nineteenth century acquired wholly questionable sub-disciplines which were no longer expected to participate in God’s self-knowledge, but were instead expected simply to establish the foundational facts and with pure historical neutrality (on which the Church as department of state depends): biblical criticism, Church history (as no longer a reflection on divine providence), historical theology, and so forth.¹⁰

So it happens that, according to Milbank, theology in modernity became part of the state’s own self-survival. Theology, in any capitulation to modern secular reason, becomes manipulable as a tool to uphold the morality needed for social cohesion. In this way, the state is parasitic on trust, and other desirable attributes of individuals that religion maintains. But, ultimately, the parasite risks killing the source of such nourishment. As Milbank points out, society ‘looks to the “social” to preserve the essence of human life’, at which point ‘theology should be alarmed, to note that often the sociologists themselves here discover a “role” for religion’.¹¹

In the following quote, he describes how some church fathers were willing to accept a notion of political providence, albeit reluctantly:

If submission to pagan political authority was, nonetheless, earnestly advocated, then this was because a coercive order ensuring a certain rough justice (but no longer defence of race or territory) was seen as God’s will for the limitation and discipline of sin in the interval before the final *eschaton*. However, it is abundantly clear from the writings of Ambrose, Augustine and others, that the gradual conversion of Roman citizens and of Roman rulers was expected to have implications for the character of political

8. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 59.

9. Milbank, “Thomistic Telescope,” 47.

10. Milbank, “Conflict of the Faculties,” 312.

11. Milbank, “Body by Love Possessed,” 88.

governance, and indeed (in a manner they found inherently problematic to define) to bring this rule also within the scope of the ecclesial rule. At the same time, the gradual confusion of boundaries between *imperium* and *ecclesia* led to fears that the distinctive character of the ecclesial rule was being lost, and so encouraged the monastic movement: precisely the setting up of relatively self-sufficient Christian societies.¹²

This notion of the limitation of sin is reminiscent of the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:7, a text Milbank addresses in this discussion:

St Paul did not propose to abolish the biopolitical order of the Roman Empire – indeed, as Blumenfeld waspishly says, his proto-Constantinian programme rather ensured that the Roman Empire is in reality still with us. So he did not deny that the second-best – the exercise of imperative *nomos* in the face of scarcity, sin and death – would remain necessary (Romans 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:7). The latter passage suggests that all *nomos* is a temporary *katechon* restraining evil until the *eschaton* – this power to [restrain] remains, though, for Paul thoroughly ambiguous and literally daemonic, as Carl Schmitt's reading of this passage fails to recognize.¹³

Milbank's comment raises the question that even if the restrainer is 'daemonic', as he suggests, it is still ultimately under the control of God. Nor does Milbank conclude from this passage that the *nomos* preserves society against evil, and that this might involve the exercise of force. Milbank, known for his criticism of violence, is critical of any doctrines and theologians that require or justify violence. For example, he has little time for Reinhold Niebuhr's making a tension between the personal and political:

Christianity is seen to have tended to set impossible *personal* perfectionism over against a dangerously exaggerated *political* pessimism. Occasionally, as in Luther's exhortation to the peasants, the perfectionism is hypocritically intruded into the political sphere. The essence of the latter is seen to consist in a necessity for violent coercion that results from the fall; yet often this imperfect power has been wrongly treated as sacred, as the direct presence of a divine created order.¹⁴

Given Milbank's distaste for violence, it is no wonder that he is disparaging of Luther and Niebuhr. What makes belief in the necessity of violence feasible is an account of the way things are. For Milbank, an account of reality that makes violence necessary is based on an 'ontology of violence', which he calls a 'malign mythology'.¹⁵

12. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 403.

13. Milbank, "Paul against Biopolitics," 159.

14. John Milbank, "The Poverty of Niebuhrism," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 235.

15. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 279.

Such an 'ontology of violence' is, according to Milbank, 'a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force.'¹⁶ Milbank does not accept the necessity of violence, yet does not directly address others' arguments for why they see violence or legitimate counter-force (as they might see it) as necessary. Milbank does, at times, allow for the possibility of the justification of violence: 'even justified violence is the justification of a lesser evil.'¹⁷ But he would not allow this justification to be based in an ontology which demands violence.

Milbank not only argues against the necessity of violence, he is also critical of any doctrine of providence that creates passive acceptance of the way things are. In a criticism of Gregory Baum he writes:

Like all *political economists*, political and liberation theologians shift politics and economics from the site of ethics to the site of a theology of providence. For, in making the merely algebraic equation, liberation = salvation, they still celebrate a hidden working of divine design through purely immanent processes. What they really say is what they claim not to say: namely that Christians should say their prayers, be decent citizens, and otherwise just accept society as it is.¹⁸

Milbank, in other words, tells us what providence should not be: a secular doctrine of the social science that operates to support capitalism and the profane state. He does not suggest that this is a secularized Christian doctrine, since it appears as having an important place in the rise of modern capitalist society. As evidence for this we find Milbank writing: 'divine agency is invoked much more directly as an explanatory cause in the eighteenth century (both in natural and social science) than in the Middle Ages.'¹⁹ From this, one gets the impression from Milbank that a doctrine of providence is a modern notion with a special place in modern reason.

In one of his rare passages on providence, Milbank discusses the Thomistic roots of Henri de Lubac's *Surnatural* thesis.²⁰ Milbank writes that for Aquinas, as for de Lubac, 'the providential mode of dealing with spiritual creatures ultimately includes grace, since such creatures attain the "ultimate end" of knowing and loving God.'²¹ While Milbank does not draw out any political implications about grace here, the notion of grace was linked positively to the politics of the state in the lifetime of de Lubac, in the Barmen Declaration Article VI. In other Reformed sources, much has been made of

16. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 4.

17. John Milbank, "Violence: Double passivity," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 26.

18. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 249. Nicholas Lash considers this passage 'tasteless' in "Not Exactly Politics of Power?" *Modern Theology* 8, no. 4 (1992): 357.

19. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 38–39.

20. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 98.

21. *Ibid.*, 99.

“common grace” having providential importance.²² Barth also placed the state within the realm of Grace.²³

Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, in an essay that discusses Erasmus to illuminate Milbank, suggests that in the sphere of social and political ethics ‘Milbank’s constructive thought has only made sketchy forays beyond the foundational stage’.²⁴ She draws on two of Erasmus’s texts but finds in them weaknesses that are implied criticisms of Milbank too. The texts fail, she writes, to clearly discriminate, ‘firstly, the goods of created human community from their disordered condition, and secondly, God’s providential work of preserving the common goods of sinful humanity through structures of political authority and human law.’²⁵ A shade more explicit as a criticism of Milbank is O'Donovan’s judgment of Erasmus’s political theology: ‘His rhetoric of civil government particularly suffers from theological incompleteness in its failure to recognize as a distinct Trinitarian work *ad extra* the Father’s preservation of the sinful human community by the lawful use of coercive power and to relate this work to the universal rule of the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit.’²⁶

This is a fair assessment of Milbank’s position on the politics of providence. While Milbank speaks of the suppression of theological reflection on providence in modernity, he does little to reintroduce an explicit doctrine of providence into his own theology. His political theology lacks a theological doctrine of providence or preservation which has a rôle for the God in relation to the state. Instead he finds a secular form of providence at the heart of secular political economy. The latter part of this chapter will consider why this is the case.

Cavanaugh and the Non-Necessity of Preservation

Like Milbank, William Cavanaugh is not known for his writings on providence or preservation. Cavanaugh’s placing of the state in competition with the church means that Cavanaugh is likely to be more interested in the preservation of the church and the individual Christian life, than the preservation of the state. In fact, the preservation and expansion of the one leads in such an agonistic theology to the demise of the other. At the individual level, we can see how this might work. In discussing torture, Cavanaugh writes how the secular liturgy of torture is one way in which Pinochet’s state in Chile was able to preserve itself, often at the expense of the will to self-preservation of the individuals the practice of torture created.²⁷ The state’s liturgy

22. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 441.

23. Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, ed. Will Herberg (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 156; Min, *Sin and Politics*, 104-105.

24. Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, “The Christian Pedagogy and Ethics of Erasmus,” in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, by Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 122.

25. *Ibid.*, 122.

26. *Ibid.*, 136.

27. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 40.

of torture works against the individual preserving the integrity of their union of body and soul, with the victim often surrendering one to save the other.²⁸ The liturgical element is that the state makes citizens by breaking down other allegiances, such as resistance movements and especially, for Cavanaugh, the church. For Cavanaugh, this runs counter to how the Eucharist makes the individual a political actor through grafting them into the true politics of the body of Christ.

If the state is a torturer, as Cavanaugh claims it is, this throws up the problem of how such a state can be seen at the same time as a means of God's preservation. Surely God would not sanction torture as legitimate in the preservation of the social order? If this is permitted, then such a doctrine becomes a serious problem for Christian political theology; for not only is such a doctrine of the state a conservative one, that is offensive to the victims of torture, but it raises the problem of theodicy. An ongoing concern with the doctrine of providence has been its ostensibly conservative nature, as Charles Cashdollar notes in his survey of the nineteenth-century debates on providence in America. He comments that conservatives used providential theory as a sort of practical theodicy. 'Essentially, they saw the socio-economic order as God-ordained, a perfectly composed "preceptive" moral order operating to the benefit of man.'²⁹ Social injustice and poverty were acceptable because they served the common good by having disciplinary or punitive actions. This theory encouraged the view that if one was poor or sick or otherwise harmed, God was responsible.³⁰

This view did not last, which allowed the rise of the view that if evil did happen then we can blame Satan or an enemy, or a secular state. Cashdollar further observes that the 'demise of the orthodox theory [of providence] was, as its critics knew, a prerequisite for the Social Gospel.'³¹ With the demise of providence, Cashdollar writes that other doctrines, such as Christology, stepped in to fill the doctrinal vacuum. This might help explain why Cavanaugh has a high Christology and no discernible doctrine of providence. Cashdollar also notes that the decline of providence correlated with the rise of social sciences to explain social evils.³² Cavanaugh's own decoupling of divine providence from the state has more than a hint of theodicy about it. The state's evil, such as torture, provides an example of the classic conflict between evil and God's providence. God is innocent, as far as torture is concerned, if the Antichrist is the torturer and not the state that God has providentially raised up. Death squads become the full responsibility of Satan, and bear no relationship to God's works.

In the tensions between doctrines, Cavanaugh's political theology also fits into the conflict already mentioned between eschatology and preservation. As he writes,

28. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 40.

29. Charles D. Cashdollar, "The Social Implications of the Doctrine of Divine Providence: A Nineteenth-Century Debate in American Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 3/4 (1978): 274.

30. See the quote from William Plumer in *ibid.*, 278.

31. *Ibid.*, 282.

32. *Ibid.*, 283–284.

'Eschatology is always in tension with history.'³³ For Cavanaugh, this can be clearly seen in how the church has come to understand the Eucharist: 'The Eucharist has lost much of its eschatological import precisely where the church has come to feel at home in the world, forfeiting its sense of the transitory nature of the Christian sojourn among the earthly kingdoms.'³⁴ So rather than the church being sustained by the Eucharist in its worldly sojourn (like the Israelites were sustained by manna in their Exodus), the church has been an agent sustaining the state, making its home among the kingdoms of this world, and in the process suppressing true eschatology. Cavanaugh, in response, makes the Eucharist representative of the eschatology that was suppressed by the church:

It has been all too easy to regard the Eucharist as a mere representation of a past historical event in order to secure the graces won in that past event. Secular history – the uniform, and literally end-less, progress of time which makes the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ ever more remote from us – has come to predominate over eschatology, with grave consequences for the church. As the church made itself at home in the world's time, the urgent sense of pilgrimage through a temporary world toward an eternal end was muted. The Eucharist became a sacrifice performed for the benefit of the church which re-presented before God the historical process of redemption which had already been achieved in the past. The Eucharist as the inbreaking of the future Kingdom of God into time was suppressed.³⁵

For Cavanaugh and Gregory Dix (whom Cavanaugh draws on here), the Eucharist risks becoming a mere memorial of something in the past and, at most, something that sustains the church, rather than an eschatological reality.³⁶ But what is at stake here is bringing eschatological reality so far forward into the present that one risks creating a realized eschatology, with a folding of time back on itself so that the future becomes the present in which the church becomes the realization of the Kingdom of God. We are not, therefore, sustained for anything, but have amongst us the realization of God's plan for creation. As Cavanaugh writes: 'But Christ's resurrection also marks his decisive triumph over sin, and thus the beginning of the new age in which we already are living.'³⁷ In this short quote, we see the removal of the need for the suppression of sin (since it has been defeated) and the elimination of preservation for redemption (since we are already in the kingdom). This is at the root of Cavanaugh's criticism of the notion of the mystical body of Christ:

33. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 273. Also see 79, 179, 184.

34. *Ibid.*, 225.

35. *Ibid.*, 222.

36. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), 305–306.

37. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 227.

The adjective “mystical,” when applied to the church, in the cases we have studied, signals a retreat in varying degrees from any interruption of historical time by the Kingdom of God. We look for the Kingdom outside of time. The eschatological significance of the body of Christ, and the sacramental action which produces it, is effectively denied. Christ comes to the individual upon her death, but the parousia as the end of history and its anticipation within history are rendered incomprehensible by a state and an earthly *patria* which declare their own indispensability and insist on their own perpetuity.³⁸

Here, we may note that Cavanaugh not only rejects the state’s false claim to permanent necessity, but is sceptical about its necessity at all. Not only is the state, for Cavanaugh, unrelated to our redemption, but by denying it any penultimate significance, he renders it irrelevant to our preservation. Here Cavanaugh brings a Hauerwasian/Yoderian critique to the doctrine of preservation in arguing against the notion that it is the churches’ task to ‘manage history by bringing some order to a more basic chaos.’³⁹ To think this, Cavanaugh argues, relies on a distortion of Christian ethics that treats the sin-filled *not yet* as a ‘constant feature of life on earth.’⁴⁰ Such a description of ‘reality’, Cavanaugh argues, sees only the one city ‘protected from dissolution by the state, a natural institution meant to safeguard those penultimate political goods that require protection by coercion.’⁴¹ This runs counter to a tradition in the church that understands, better than the state itself does, that the rôle of the state is as a means of preservation *for* future redemption.

Cavanaugh’s theology emphasizes the eschatological nature of Christianity. Representative of his general approach is his criticism that, in Luther, the eschaton is ‘indefinitely deferred’, making the temporal authorities a permanent necessity.⁴² In support of this view, Cavanaugh cites the following passage from Luther, where the reformer writes of the two governments: ‘Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other.’⁴³ For Luther, the temporal authority must be allowed ‘to remain’, which Cavanaugh reads as Luther’s total removal of the eschatological. But in another translation of the same passage, the verbal phrase *bleiben lassen* is rendered ‘continue’, which means something closer

38. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 220.

39. William T. Cavanaugh, “From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space,” *Political Theology* 7, no. 3 (2006): 318.

40. *Ibid.*, 317.

41. *Ibid.*, 317–318.

42. Cavanaugh, “Separation and Wholeness,” 20.

43. Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523,” in *Luther’s Works, Volume 45: The Christian in Society II*, ed. Walther I. Brandt, trans. J. J. Schindel and Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1971), 92.

to the interim rôle of the secular government.⁴⁴ It could also mean 'to be left to do its own work', since this is what Luther thinks is important: that both governments, temporal and spiritual, be allowed, without interference from the other, to perform their functions. For Luther, and as Cavanaugh observes above, the state must be as permanent as the sinfulness of humanity: 'for the world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are baptized and Christian in name.'⁴⁵

But does Cavanaugh get Luther right? The interpretation of Luther depends, as shown above, on how Luther is translated, but does Cavanaugh make Luther into a straw man who does not believe in the return of Christ and therefore the final eradication of sin in Christ's Kingdom?⁴⁶ But despite this potential bias is Cavanaugh's reading of Luther, he is not the only one who has observed Luther's 'de-eschatologizing'.⁴⁷

Cavanaugh's emphasis on the eschatological nature of Christianity is at the expense of any positive appraisal of a doctrine of preservation. Traditionally, such a doctrine has been linked to preservation against the effects of sin. Cavanaugh seems to have no need for the state to act as a restrainer of sin in the public realm. Is this because Cavanaugh's anthropology lacks a strong notion of personal sin? A common complaint against anarchists is that they are too idealistic about human nature and do not have an adequate concept of sin.⁴⁸ It is unclear why Cavanaugh sees no need for the state to perform this rôle, and makes no case for the state on this basis. Perhaps this is because of his anti-violence, and his lack of an anthropology which adequately deals with sin. Rather, Cavanaugh wishes to cast off the state altogether. In this way he is in the tradition of Hananiah (Jeremiah 28) who wanted to throw off the yoke of the Babylonian Empire. But, as a false prophet, Hananiah does not recognize that the Empire was part of God's design for the long term survival of Israel.

Another way Cavanaugh critiques the state is on the basis of the means by which it sustains itself. Cavanaugh's position, that the state is founded and sustained in violence, means that, for him, the preservation of the social order by the state will involve violence.⁴⁹ From a similar position, Ellul finds violence in the establishment of states, but goes on to ask, 'Now how does a government stay in power?' His answer

44. Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority: how far does the Obedience owed to it extend?" in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. and trans. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11. Luther uses similar language elsewhere, see Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 24.

45. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 91.

46. See Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., "The Augsburg Confession (1530)," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), § XVII.

47. Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Volume 1: Foundations*, ed. William H. Lazareth, trans. John W. Doberstein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 380.

48. See Dave Morland, "Anarchism, Human Nature and History: Lessons for the Future," in *Twenty-First Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for the New Millennium*, ed. Jon Purkis and James Bowen (London: Cassell, 1997), 8–23; and also Reinhold Niebuhr, "Catholicism and Anarchism in Spain," *Radical Religion* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1937): 25.

49. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 41.

is simple: 'By violence, simply by violence.'⁵⁰ This is a fact that has been observed by many theologians, but with different outcomes. Some, by rejecting violence, reject the state; others, in accepting the state, accept its force as a necessary evil. Consider this passage from Barth:

I quote T. Haering (*Das Christliche Leben*, 1907, p. 427): "If the Christian deliberately wants the state for the sake of the kingdom of God, then with this means to advance the kingdom of God he must also want the means by which the state is supported. But there is no penal law above the various nations; its ultimate means to maintain its rights is war, the self-defence of nations."⁵¹

This quotation is used by Barth to illustrate the point that many theologians falsely, and too easily, accept the necessity of war as the means essential to the state. But for theologians with more anarchist leanings, Haering's point is honest, but clearly not normative for the Christian theologian. If we want to have a state, we cannot refuse the means of the state, these being violence and war. If these means are rejected, it follows that we reject the state. This is the argument of pacifist-anarchist Christians, such as Leo Tolstoy, who claimed that the non-resistance taught by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (especially Matthew 5:39) applies equally to individuals and states.⁵² Cavanaugh clearly has much sympathy with such a view, as witnessed throughout his corpus.

Finally, we may add that, for Cavanaugh, based on his view of the alternative soteriology of the state, the notion that the state separated from its redemptive function makes no sense. With his focus on the conflict between the state's and the church's salvation, Cavanaugh may have missed seeing that in order to reach salvation point we first need to be preserved. Although, in one of his more recent pieces, Cavanaugh does appear to allow some room for the Holy Spirit in the time of penultimate to move politically in rejecting as simplistic the outright and full condemnation of 'Constantinianism', agreeing that 'God will write straight with crooked lines.'⁵³

It is a weakness of the political theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh that the doctrines of providence and preservation do not feature strongly in their work.

50. Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (London: SCM Press, 1970), 85.

51. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III, The Doctrine of Creation, Part 4*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. Mackay et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), § 55.2, p. 457. An English rendition of Theodor von Haering's text is *The Ethics of the Christian Life*, trans. James S. Hill (London / New York: Williams and Norgate / G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), 431-432.

52. Leo Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God is Within You," in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, Tolstoy centenary ed, vol. 20, trans. Aylmer Maude, *The Works of Leo Tolstoy* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, for the Tolstoy Society, 1935), 1-460. Also see Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 50-61.

53. Cavanaugh, "Separation and Wholeness," 17.

The following discussion of the biblical foundations and theological traditions on providence will suggest why this might be so.

The Politics of Preservation in Christian Tradition

The theological doctrine of preservation, which is a part of the broader doctrine of providence, presumes a creation to be preserved, and therefore typically follows the doctrine of creation in theology. As Benjamin Farley observes, the 'great confessional documents of the Reformed tradition follow this order.'⁵⁴ Similarly, John Calvin, in an anti-deist passage, wrote that:

Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception.⁵⁵

This section discusses the theological doctrine of preservation and its relationship to politics and the state. This will enable an assessment of where Milbank and Cavanaugh are situated in relation to this doctrine.

Preservation in the Bible

As this section will show, the doctrine of preservation is a biblical doctrine. Benjamin Farley, in describing the doctrine of preservation, breaks it down into three components: the 'preservation of the physical universe, the earth and its species,' the 'preservation of humankind,' and the 'preservation of the people of God.'⁵⁶ It is worth considering these in turn.

Of creation in general, it is to God that creation and its ongoing life is attributed, as in the words of Ezra in Nehemiah 9:6: 'To all of them you give life'. In Hebrews 1:3 we read that God, through Christ, 'sustains all things by his powerful word.' And from Colossians 1:17: 'He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' Louis Berkhof cites all these verses (and many others) as the scriptural basis for the doctrine of preservation, which he defines as 'that continuous work of God by which He maintains the things which He created, together with the properties and powers which He endowed them.'⁵⁷

The preservation of humankind is a more specific form of preservation. This occurs in each individual life, and also for whole peoples. Humans are commanded to procreate and increase the size of the human family (Genesis 1:28). But God preserves

54. Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 27.

55. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.1.

56. Farley, *Providence of God*, 32–37.

57. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 170.

not only the human species, but also each individual life. God is the ‘keeper’ (Psalm 121:5) and ‘upholder’ (Psalm 54:4) of each individual. God is also our guardian, preserving us from enemies and threats (Psalm 64:1; 143:11).

Farley affirms that the creation does not, in a theological understanding, exist for itself – it exists for the glory of God. The preserving activity of God preserves a people who acknowledge God as their Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. There is a covenantal aspect to this form of preservation. With obedience to God, his people can endure. This link between obedience and preservation is also found in Exodus 20:12: ‘Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.’ Also 1 Kings 11:38: ‘If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.’

Further to Farley’s exposition of the biblical basis of preservation, Christian theology has typically instructed that preservation of the social order is not where history ends. Consider Hebrews 13:14: ‘For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.’ For Bonhoeffer here is an eschatological expectation of divine rule that transcends the temporal earthly city that cannot last forever, when compared with the hope Christians have for the everlasting glorification of the heavenly city and God’s eternal rule in Heaven.⁵⁸

Having dealt with the generalities of preservation in scripture, the next section will turn to another aspect of providence, or the flip-side of preservation, that of perishing.

Preservation versus Perishing

Divine providence not only preserves, but also allows its opposite: the judgment and laying waste of those who do not serve God. Both these aspects of providence must be taken together. The Old Testament, in particular, makes it clear that, along with the power to create, the power to destroy also lies in God’s hands, and that those who do not obey God will ultimately perish. Consider Isaiah 60:12, with its explicit political overtones:

For the nation and kingdom
that will not serve you shall perish;
those nations shall be utterly laid waste.

So while God lays some cities, or even entire nations to waste (Amos 3:6), God also raises up some nations in order to subdue others (1 Chronicles 5:26; Isaiah 45:1).

58. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Theological Position Paper on State and Church,” in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 504.

Furthermore, in the New Testament, Jesus links the avoidance of perishing with repentance (Luke 13:1–5).⁵⁹

There is a covenantal sense in the above scriptures that the wicked perish under the judgment of God (Deuteronomy 8:19; Psalm 37:20; Proverbs 11:10; 19:9), and that the good and faithful will not perish (John 3:16). Yet there is also a sense in which *all* people are preserved by God's action. First of all, the Noahic Covenant assures humanity that never again will God destroy the Earth (Genesis 9:11). And later, the city of Sodom could have been saved if only a few righteous people could be found within its walls (Genesis 18:20–32). Yet both these examples are negative acts of omission; more positively, God 'makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (Matthew 5:45), and upholds all his creatures (Matthew 6:26–30).⁶⁰

What could this teaching – that God causes some to perish, while preserving others – mean politically? One possible answer is that it is God who decides who is raised up and who is laid to waste, with regard to both nations and individuals (see Psalm 73⁶¹). This dual nature of providence and perishing is sometimes obscured by recent interpreters of divine providence in contemporary political life. In *American Providence*, Webb argues that some contemporary theologians, such as Stanley Hauerwas, readily accept the judgment side of providence, without appreciating the other side. According to Webb, Hauerwas readily acknowledges God's judgment in an event such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA, while not appreciating the ways in which God has lifted up the USA to be a chosen nation.⁶² Whether or not Webb is being fair to Hauerwas on whether he ignores the twofold nature of providence, Webb highlights the valid point that these two sides (preservation and perishing) must be held together in a sound doctrine of providence. Webb's analysis of Hauerwas, as will be seen below, can also be applied to Milbank and Cavanaugh.

The State as an Order of Preservation

Having dealt with the doctrine of providence in general terms, this section will discuss the problem of the means of God's preservation of human society, and the theological question on whether the state can be an order of preservation.

The central question here is to what extent, if at all, the state can be viewed as a means of God's preservation of individuals and human society. That God provides for

59. For commentary on this point, see Guy D. Nave Jr., *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, Academia Biblica 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 149n19, 174–179.

60. This perspective on God's providence can be found in Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 118–119.

61. For one interpretation of this Psalm and its relationship to God's providence see John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David*, trans. Arthur Golding, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 267–288.

62. See Webb, *American Providence*, 69–88.

his creatures is a given here, for, as Augustine wrote, 'Can't the one who gives you life give you the means of passing your life?'⁶³ Following this general providential line, the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith (1566) affirms: 'We believe that all things in heaven and on earth, and in all creatures, are preserved and governed by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God.' It goes on to speak of the subject of this section, the means of preservation: 'we do not spurn as useless the means by which divine providence works, but we teach that we are to adapt ourselves to them in so far as they are recommended to us in the Word of God.'⁶⁴

If taken seriously, this teaching on the means of preservation becomes important, since it raises the problem of political evil and the state's use of force. If the divine means for human preservation includes the state, then this raises a question about whether the state's evil can be reconciled with the work of a loving God. It is for this reason that some theologians, who perceive the state to be involved in profoundly evil acts (such as torture), reject it as profane, and wish to sever the link between God's work and the state. Such questions have been at the forefront of the discussion of the political providence from the Church Fathers to the present day.

Church Fathers on Preservation

In the tradition of theological reflection on scripture and politics, it is a common view that God has provided rulers for society. In an exegesis of Romans 13:1, Theodoret of Cyrus finds rulers are provided as a gift from God, since: 'These depend on God's providence: he it is who in his care for the general order has arranged for some to rule and be ruled, bringing upon wrongdoers fear of rulers like a kind of bridle.'⁶⁵ Theodoret also writes that the inequality in human community was provided by God so that fear of rulers could provide order and peace.⁶⁶

Augustine is one of the foremost Western theologians of providence. Against the positions of non-believers, Augustine affirms that God is interested in earthly affairs: 'But other fools are not lacking who have said: "The Lord shall not see," that is, He does not extend his providence to these earthly affairs.'⁶⁷ Against others, Augustine begins with a clear statement of the duplicitous nature of the notion of providence. Of those who complained about the Christian era, but survived the collapse of Rome, he

63. Augustine, "Sermon 177: On the Words of the Apostle, 1 Timothy 6:7-19: We Brought Nothing into this World, and What is More We Cannot Take Anything Out of It, etc.; A Discourse on Avarice," in *Sermons, (148-183) on the New Testament. Volume III/5*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine (New York: New City Press, 1992), ¶5.

64. See Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., "The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM Press, 1966), § 6.

65. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul, Volume One*, trans., with an introduction by Robert Charles Hill (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 122.

66. Theodoret of Cyrus, *On Divine Providence*, ed. Thomas Halton, Ancient Christian Writers 49 (New York / Mahwah: Newman Press, 1988).

67. Augustine, "Letter 184A: Augustine to Peter and Abraham," in *Letters: Volume IV (165-203)*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, vol. 30, Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), § 6.

writes, 'They attribute their deliverance to their own destiny; whereas if they had any right judgement they ought rather to attribute the harsh cruelty they suffered at the hands of their enemies to the providence of God.'⁶⁸ More positively Augustine states:

the providence of God rules and administers the whole creation, both natures and wills: natures in order to give them existence, wills so that those that are good may not be without merit, and those that are evil may not go unpunished.⁶⁹

Augustine is clear that the 'increase and preservation of the Roman Empire' could not have been due to the actions of Roman gods, but can only be attributed to God.⁷⁰ By sustaining the empire, God provided for the sphere in which Christ was born, killed, and through which his message spread to the ends of the Earth.⁷¹

Toward the end of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine relates the story of the dilemma faced by the Saguntines, through which he contrasts the city of man and the city of God.⁷² In this example, the pagan Saguntines had to decide between their faith, which bound them to Rome, and their safety. By choosing to follow their faith, they perished, earning the praise of all 'citizens of the earthly commonwealth'. In the City of God, however, this dilemma vanishes because safety is acquired through faith alone, and therefore they cannot come into conflict because they are one and the same. Something similar is claimed by those Christians who understand that to seek the safety of the Empire or state is not merely to compromise faith, but to place one's faith in where one's safety lies. This problem is also seen in Scripture in the case of the murmuring Israelites in Sinai, who were prepared to return to the security of Egypt, were willing to place their faith in the provision of Pharaoh, while rejecting the providence of God to guide them to the promised land (Exodus 16). Another example is provided by the people of Israel returning to Jerusalem, and rejecting the protection offered by King Artaxerxes against ambush, because they had already witnessed God's protection and grace (see Ezra 8:21–23). As one commentator wrote of Ezra's decision: 'To ask for an accompanying band of soldiers would appear to be a denial of his confidence in God.'⁷³ For Christians throughout the ages, this has seemed the perennial choice: to keep the faith at the risk of death, or choose secular self-preservation over true faith in the providence of God.

68. Augustine, *City of God*, I.1. This is reverse way of stating Webb's criticism of Hauerwas above.

69. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Volume II, Books 7–12*, trans. and annot. John Hammond Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 8.23; p.64.

70. Augustine, *City of God*, IV.28.

71. Ibid., XVIII.46. According to the discussion in Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 177–178, this notion takes even a stronger form in the work of Orosius.

72. See Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.6.

73. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, *Israel Alive Again: A Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 68.

The Reformers on Preservation

In the Reformation, Luther proposed a political doctrine based on the providence of God linked to the civil authorities. In the Augsburg Confession (1530), a paragraph condemning the Anabaptists reads: 'The Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart, but it does not destroy the state or the family. On the contrary, it especially requires their preservation as ordinances of God and the exercise of love in these ordinances.'⁷⁴ On the matter of love in politics, Luther grounds obedience to the state in the fourth commandment, based on the love of the father, which includes the 'father of the nation.'⁷⁵ Luther further held that rulers and princes are preserved through the obedience of those ruled, and also through holding the gospel in honour.⁷⁶ Furthermore, 'Temporal government is preserved not only by laws and rights, but by divine authority; 'tis God maintains governments, otherwise the greatest sins in the world would remain unpunished.'⁷⁷

In the Lausanne Articles (1536), the Swiss Reformers directly linked the purpose of the state with preservation. They wrote that the church 'acknowledges the civil magistrate ordained by God only as necessary to preserve the peace and tranquillity of the state. To which end, it desires and ordains that all be obedient in so far as nothing contrary to God is commanded.'⁷⁸ For Calvin, an innate desire for self-preservation lent natural adherence to the second half of the Decalogue: 'Men have somewhat more understanding of the precepts of the Second Table [Exodus 20:12ff.] because these are more closely concerned with the preservation of civil society among them.'⁷⁹ Within Reformed theology, it is commonly accepted that the state has an important rôle in the preservation of social peace and civil society.

Bonhoeffer and the Order of Preservation

More than any other twentieth century theologian, it was the German Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote positively about the order of preservation in relation to political life. As explored in the previous chapter, both Barth and Bonhoeffer reacted against a theological turn in Germany that placed the state in the order of creation. Instead, Bonhoeffer places the state firmly in the order of preservation. Bonhoeffer rejects orders of creation because: 'That the world has fallen and that sin now rules and that the creation and sin are so intertwined that no human eye can see them as separate, that every human order is the order of the fallen world and not of creation, all that is

74. Tappert, "Augsburg Confession," § XVI.

75. Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 357–461.

76. Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell, 1883), 308.

77. *Ibid.*, 309. Luther also observed that some of the largest sins are committed by rulers.

78. Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., "The Lausanne Articles of 1536," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM Press, 1966), § VIII.

79. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.24.

not seen in its seriousness.⁸⁰ The state, then, becomes what preserves human society in a fallen world. Such orders of preservation, to Bonhoeffer, ‘are forms of purposeful formation against sin in the direction of the gospel.’⁸¹ Bonhoeffer clearly expresses this notion in *Creation and Fall*:

All orders of our fallen world are God’s orders of preservation that uphold and preserve us for Christ. They are not orders of creation but orders of preservation. They have no value in themselves; instead they find their end and meaning only through Christ. God’s new action with humankind is to uphold and preserve humankind in its fallen world, in its fallen orders, for death – for the resurrection, for the new creation, for Christ.⁸²

This theme – that the orders of preservation do not find an end in themselves, but preserve us for Christ – is central to the assessment of the secular means of creation and society. Bonhoeffer places the state in the order of preservation:

The kingdom of God takes form *in the state* insofar as the state recognizes and maintains the order of preservation of life and insofar as it accepts responsibility for preserving this world from collapse and for exercising its authority here against the destruction of life.⁸³

For Bonhoeffer, the value of the order of preservation does not lie within itself, as an order of creation might claim for itself, but has value only insofar as it is open to Christ.⁸⁴ He finds the orders of preservation more theologically congenial than orders of creation, but he also finds support for the order of preservation in scripture:

Only two things can prevent the final fall into the abyss: the miracle of a new awakening of faith; and the power that the Bible calls “the restrainer,” *κατεχων* (2 Thessalonians 2:7), that is, the ordering power, equipped with great physical strength, which successfully stands in the way of those who would throw themselves into the abyss. The miracle is the rescuing act of God that reaches in from above, beyond all historical calculations and probabilities, and creates new life out of nothingness—that is, the resurrection from the dead. The “restraining power” [das Aufhaltende] is the force that is made effective within history by God’s rule of the world,

80. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lecture in Ciernohorské Kúpele: On the Theological Foundation of the Work of the World Alliance,” in *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work, 1931–1932*, ed. Victoria Barnett, Mark S. Brouck, and Michael B. Lukens, trans. Anne Schmidt-Lange et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 363.

81. *Ibid.*, 364.

82. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 140.

83. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God’s Kingdom on Earth,” in *Berlin, 1932–1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 293. Bonhoeffer’s italics.

84. Bonhoeffer, “Lecture in Ciernohorské Kúpele,” 364.

which sets limits to evil. The “restrainer” [das Aufhaltende] itself is not God and is not without guilt, but God uses it to protect the world from disintegration. The place where God’s miracle is proclaimed is the church. The “restraining power” is the ordering power of the state. As different as they are in essence, they move close to each other in the face of threatening chaos, and the hatred of the destructive powers directs itself to both of them alike as deadly enemies.⁸⁵

Bonhoeffer later turned from the language of ‘orders’ to that of ‘mandates’ (namely: marriage and family, work, government, church), developing this idea in his uncompleted *Ethics*.⁸⁶ Despite the linguistic change, the point remains that, in the divine mandate of government, there is a preservative function. The difference lies in the turn toward the divine initiative, rather than the institutions, or concrete social realities, as the locus of divine action. But, in promoting the state (or government mandate) as an order of preservation, and as the restrainer, Bonhoeffer takes his readers into the quagmire of the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2. This passage all but defies interpretation, with modern scholarship on this passage barely advancing beyond Augustine’s assessment of it as being impenetrable.⁸⁷

Yet, as Augustine pointed out, there have been many guesses and attempts at interpretation, with influential interpretations helping to win the text a certain importance. Bonhoeffer follows many of the Church Fathers in seeing the restrainer as a political power. Tertullian, for instance, saw the Roman Empire as having a rôle in arresting worldly afflictions.⁸⁸ Adso of Montier-en-Der saw that the Antichrist could not gain ground as long as the Roman Empire has all nations under its control.⁸⁹ Based on such ancient and medieval interpretations, Carl Schmitt claims that this text and the notion of the restrainer was of capital importance in the Middle Ages.⁹⁰ He writes that, ‘The empire of the Christian Middle Ages lasted only as long as the idea of the *katechon* was alive.’⁹¹ As Giorgio Agamben remarks, the ancient traditions of interpretation

85. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 131–132. Also see “Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God’s Kingdom on Earth,” in *Berlin, 1932–1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 293, where Bonhoeffer writes: ‘the power of death . . . is restrained in the state through the order of the preservation of life.’

86. See discussion in Clifford J. Green, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in *Ethics*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 17–22.

87. Augustine, *City of God*, XX.19.

88. Tertullian, “Apology,” in *Tertullian: Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix: Octavius*, by Tertullian and Minucius Felix, trans. Rudolphus Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, vol. 10, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), § 32.

89. Adso of Montier-en-Der, “Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist,” in *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*, ed. and trans. Bernard McGinn (London: SPCK, 1979), 93. Schmitt offers a small survey of similar interpretations in *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. and annot. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 60.

90. *Ibid.*, 59–60, 87.

91. *Ibid.*, 60.

of this passage culminate 'in the Schmittian theory that finds in 2 Thessalonians 2 the only possible foundation for a Christian doctrine of State power.'⁹² Bonhoeffer is just one theologian who justified the state on the basis of this passage. But its influence may extend into secular thought, as Agamben writes: 'In a certain sense, every theory of the State, including Hobbes's—which thinks of it as a power destined to block or delay catastrophe—can be taken as a secularization of this interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2.'⁹³

For Bonhoeffer, orders of preservation negatively judge orders of creation and anticipate orders of redemption, insofar as the preserved creatures are directed toward redemption in Christ. This makes sense of the current state of the fallen world: 'From a Christian perspective the fallen world becomes understandable as the world preserved and maintained by God for the coming of Christ, a world in which we *as human beings* can and should live a "good" life in given orders.'⁹⁴ Christianity, therefore, affirms the rôle of God as sustaining creation and directing it in line with both the order of creation and redemption. Barth expressed this idea in these words: 'In its politics it will always be urging the civil community to treat this fundamental purpose of its existence with the utmost seriousness: the limiting and the preserving of man by the quest for and the establishment of law.'⁹⁵ To summarize, the state becomes, in the Christian tradition, a means of preservation to ward off chaos and the collapse of society. Although this cannot become a theodicy against state evil and violence, we must not choose between faith and society, as the Saguntines had to.

Hendrik Berkhof finds, in the order of preservation, a neutralization of the foundation of the state. Reducing the state to an instrumentalist concept of preserving for peace:

For the state it means "de-ideologizing," a reduction to its true dimensions. The state no longer serves its own interest and no longer enslaves men to the world view it propagates; it becomes simply a means of staving off chaos and ordering human relations in such a way that we can all lead a quiet and stable life and follow God's call, unhampered by external hindrances.⁹⁶

This approach of 'de-ideologizing' is similar to the notion of desacralization discussed in Chapter 6. But here it must be asked whether this preservationist approach to the state cannot also risk becoming ideologized, idolized, or made into more than a mere means. When we understand God as our preserver, we create the

92. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 109.

93. *Ibid.*, 110.

94. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 165. Bonhoeffer's italics.

95. Barth, "Christian Community," 172. Also 174, 175.

96. Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 2nd ed., trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1977), 59.

conditions in which a parody of this can come about, that is making our preserver, the state in this case, into our god. This possibility is enhanced if the preservation of society is given such a high value that it must be maintained at almost any cost. This is a particular risk in modernity, with the decline of the doctrine of divine providence and secularization of the doctrine of preservation in sociology. It also implies justifying the means by which the state operates, which necessarily involves force. For some, this force means the state is violent and profane. For others, the state is God's sacred *katechon*.

Contrasting with the view that the secular state is an idol with preservative powers, is the view that the state is sacred because it is God's tool for preservation. But, viewing the state as an order of God's preservation does not automatically sacralize the state; it is not necessary to see a direct immediate link between God and the state erected for this purpose. God can use the state which is created by people for this purpose. And the state is never the sole means of preservation in society – to make it so would be totalitarian and dismissive of the preserving power of the Church, the family and other institutions which also check the power of socially destructive forces. The state would be sacralized where it alone is given the power to preserve – either as God's sole instrument of societal preservation, or as an autonomous preserving agent independent of God but with a sacral rôle to preserve society.

Ancient and Modern Challenges to Providence and Preservation

The doctrines of providence and preservation were not the first doctrines that Christian theologians or the church adopted. They developed later, as the reality of Christ's non-return started to be taken seriously by a church that had to grapple with mundane day-to-day issues while awaiting his return. Expecting Christ's imminent return, the earliest Christians had little need for a doctrine of providence, and instead prepared themselves for this event. That the early Christians held this position is supported by examining the earliest Christian writings in the New Testament. In his study of the *parousia* and its scriptural basis, Osvaldo Vena finds that eschatology is a major focus of the earliest writings, such as 1 Thessalonians, whereas ecclesiological and missiological concerns developed only with the decline of eschatological expectation, as he finds it in the later books of Mark and 2 Peter.⁹⁷ Further evidence may be found in the practice of baptism. Whereas in the New Testament baptism appears to be immediate (Acts 8:36–38; 16:33), as time passed the catechumenate developed, with some people taking three years to prepare for the sacrament. Such a change may have come about from an acceptance of the delay in Christ's return.

97. Osvaldo D. Vena, *The Parousia and Its Rereadings: The Development of the Eschatological Consciousness in the Writings of the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 262–263.

This had important effects for politics throughout salvation history, with a tangible tension between this early eschatological expectation, and a need to preserve the church and human society against threats to its stability, and even survival. Commenting on such changes in theological focus, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes:

This functional shift within early Christian apocalyptic literature indicates a change in the socio-political situation of the Christian community. It signals a shift from an alternative vision of the world and political power to the rejection of the world for the sake of the afterlife, from a counter-cultural Christian movement to a church adapted and integrated into its culture and society, from a social-political, religious ethos to an individualized and privatized ethics.⁹⁸

It remains a challenge for the church to balance these perspectives, and much contemporary theology can be seen as working through this tension. For example, Yoder, in a passage from a similar perspective as that of Schüssler Fiorenza, writes that this theological transformation was given impetus in the post-Constantinian period. Prior to Constantine's conversion, it was taken on faith alone that Christ was ruling the world. Afterwards, one knew this as a matter of empirical experience, and the notion of a 'a believing church' was thereafter an object of faith: 'Thus the order of redemption was subordinated to that of preservation, and the Christian hope turned inside out.'⁹⁹ The negative results of the conversion of Constantine meant, for Yoder, that, 'Providence no longer needed to be an object of faith, for God's governance of history had become empirically evident in the person of the Christian ruler of the world.'¹⁰⁰ Eschatologically, this meant that the future had arrived, because the rule of Christ was manifest. If this is true, then 'All that God can possibly have in store for a future victory is more of what has already been won.'¹⁰¹ Yoder's point raises the issue that, with the decline of Christendom, and with increased secularization, the doctrine of preservation might also be in decline for theological reasons, related to the consummation of grace in the state. Yoder seems to believe that providence can more easily be taken on faith when the church is suffering or in a small oppressed minority, rather than when it is ruling society. But this is a temptation which takes us away from the doctrine of providence, which teaches that God's overall governance extends into both moments, as Webb affirms above.

98. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic: Some Reflections on Method," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 313–314.

99. John Howard Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), 57.

100. Yoder, "Constantinian Sources," 136.

101. *Ibid.*, 137.

These attempts to make the later church appear less eschatological than the early church risk making this history one of a steady decline.¹⁰² To such moves, Brian Daley has replied that doctrines develop in a more cyclical fashion:

Eschatological emphases in the early Church varied, apocalyptic hopes died and were revived, and individual or cosmic or ecclesiological or mystical perspectives succeeded one another, not so much in a direct line of development as in response to the social and ecclesial challenges met by Christian communities in each generation, and as an outgrowth of the personal theological interests and allegiances of individual writers.¹⁰³

The above motif of oppression can be read, therefore, as an example of the way in which providence operates. This is the dialectic between apocalyptic and preservation, which existed in the early church, and has resurfaced from time to time throughout church history, especially at points where some Christians react against the apparent compromises of the church with secular powers. Here two examples will be considered, one from the medieval period, and one from the Radical Reformation, with an assessment of whether we also live at such a time. This will be considered in the current reaction against some forms of politicized theology.

The first example comes from the thirteenth century, where the Franciscan Spirituals revived, against the accommodations of the church to the world, a revitalized eschatology.¹⁰⁴ The Franciscan Spirituals expected that a final conflict would bring about the end of the world. Their own hopes were dashed when Frederick II, who was thought to be the Antichrist ushering in the final conflict, died in 1260. But, in the assessment of Löwith, their influence has carried through until today. This legacy is alive in those who expect the kingdom of God to be ushered in through a final battle with secular evil. So, lest it is thought that eschatology is less harmful politically and spiritually than a churchly compromise with the world, Löwith makes this historical judgment, regarding historical realizations, such as the Third Reich: 'The source of all these formidable attempts to fulfil history by and within itself is the passionate, but fearful and humble, expectation of the Franciscan Spirituals that a last conflict will bring history to its climax and end.'¹⁰⁵ When it is internalized by the state, this perspective allows it to believe that it has an important spiritual rôle in realizing the fulfilment of history. In this way, the state can be held to be sacralized as a redeemer of society out of its current predicament.

102. Such a view is well represented in Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma: An Historical Study of its Problem*, trans., with an introduction by S. G. F. Brandon (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957).

103. Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

104. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 157.

105. *Ibid.*, 159.

This tension was also seen in the second example. Taken from the Reformation period, this dispute was between the Magisterial Reformers' promotion of order, and the Anabaptist's expectation of the impending eschaton. Within Anabaptism, Balthasar Hubmaier gives an account of his dispute with Hans Hut. Hubmaier charged Hut with the error of predicting an early return of Christ, which lured his followers to sell their means of subsistence and forsake their families in order to follow him.¹⁰⁶ It is obvious now that Hubmaier was correct to admonish Hut on this occasion, but the tendency within Anabaptism to concentrate more on the *parousia* than the means of preservation was more widely held than this aberration. Part of the reason for the Anabaptist apocalyptic fervour was the persecution they received at the hands of other Reformers and the Catholic church. Their suffering was seen as a sign of the approaching *parousia*.

These examples from church history highlight the point that, in political theology, tensions prevail between the doctrines of preservation and eschatology. Where preservation is dominant, we would expect a focus on the primacy of order over justice and the suppression of revolution.¹⁰⁷ Where eschatology is dominant, we would expect to find conflict with the *status quo*, which is perceived to be holding back the coming of the Kingdom or *parousia*. These impulses in theology may also be expected to arise when the other is in ascendancy. And, as shown above, Vena finds in the New Testament writings a tension between ecclesiology (which accepts a delayed *parousia*) and eschatology (which eagerly anticipates an imminent *parousia*).

While one may observe a concurrent decline in the doctrine of preservation, it would be more accurate to say that this doctrine has been secularized, bringing with it a conflict between the preserving state and a church that may sometimes side with the state, while at other times being more eschatological in outlook. With the politicization of social life in the twentieth century, as reviewed in Chapter 2, it is not surprising that as theology accommodated itself to the statism of the period, a reaction was found in movements to re-eschatologize political theology independently of its statist formulations.¹⁰⁸ However, this turn has taken a decidedly political shape, in line with the modern politicization of theology.

Despite the presence of the doctrines of providence and preservation in scripture and tradition, they have not fared well in modern times. The decline of the doctrine of providence in the West has not been at a steady rate that correlates directly with increasing secularization. It has taken blows from both philosophers and theologians over the last few centuries. The decline in the doctrine has been a result of the glacial and seismic forces, quite literally. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake shattered complacency

106. Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. and trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder, Classics of the Radical Reformation 5 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 542–543.

107. Paul Ramsey was criticised for holding this position in Charles E. Curran, *Politics, Medicine, and Christian Ethics: A Dialogue with Paul Ramsey* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 36–39.

108. See Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*, 145–178; Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2008).

about progress and the idea of a loving beneficent God.¹⁰⁹ But in many cases, it was only a facile optimism that was shaken and, as Rousseau observed, pious Christians were able to reconcile God's providence with such devastation, while the *philosophes* thought that belief in God's providence was misplaced.¹¹⁰

It was not only singular events which challenged the notion of God's providence, but also the theological accounts that went along with them. Theological explanations of the Great Irish Famine (1845–1852) helped to bring the doctrine into disrepute.¹¹¹ The twentieth century also saw a decline in the purchase of the doctrine of providence, according to Grenz. Given two world wars, and the prospect of a nuclear and other holocausts: 'A doctrine of providence which claims that all of history is moving towards a divine goal is difficult to maintain in the face of the reality of a world that appears to have spun out of control.'¹¹²

Aside from natural catastrophes and wars, the fortunes of the doctrine of providence was also harmed by slower moving events, such as the reconfiguration of the understanding of history and time that occurred over the modern period. This saw the secularization of the understanding of time, so that preservation changed from being a penultimate work of God in the pre-eschatological period (the *saeculum*) into a notion of preservation for its own sake. Science has also been destructive to the notion of preservation in general. Whereas much of the so-called conflict between science and Christianity is focused on the differences between orthodox accounts of God's creative acts and the godless accounts of the origins of the universe, perhaps a more important matter of disagreement is over the means by which the universe is preserved in being. For while the originator of the world may also be upheld as its preserver (God, or, conversely, a self-sustaining nature), a threat to theology is to risk accepting a deist approach to creation, which could affirm creation by God, together with a belief in the preservation of creation through natural laws (setting aside the premise of God at this juncture). Such a deism is contrary to the detailed providence of God attested to in scripture, where he gives the birds enough to eat and provides for humans too (Matthew 6:25–26).¹¹³ This is not only a temptation in our abstract understanding of the natural world, which can remain remote from our day-to-day affairs, but can also affect our politics and our appreciation of God's relationship to the ordering of society and the state.

109. T. D Kendrick, *The Lisbon Earthquake* (London: Methuen, 1956), 81, 139.

110. *Ibid.*, 131, 139.

111. Boyd Hilton, "The role of providence in evangelical social thought," in *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick*, ed. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215–233.

112. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 119.

113. See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 164–166. Elsewhere, in a discussion on the third commandment, he writes, "Work is not what sustains a person; God alone is." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Exposition on the First Table of the Ten Words of God," in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 643.

The notion of political deism, a derivative from the same modernist impulse as scientific deism that excludes the ongoing post-creation work of God, implies that God is sidelined in human political life. This notion is expressed in the words of Schmitt, 'The machine now runs by itself.'¹¹⁴ Political deism specifically excludes God's ongoing revelation in the created order, limiting knowledge of God to the act of creation and to the moral law planted within humanity by the Creator. It is no surprise, then that in modernity – influenced as it is by Deism – there is little place for miracles, or any other act of God in history. The political implications of this modern deistic turn are profound, since politics is reduced to a human creation based in the cutting with the grain of human nature. This is not necessarily a secular atheistic movement, but can be a Christian heresy in which God is reduced solely to the rôle of Creator, without any ongoing presence in human history. To be tempted to adopt political deism results from evacuating theology from serious political theory. This allows no room for the ongoing revelation of God in creation, and excluding God's action from the operation of human politics.

In considering the connection between political deism and the sacralization of the state it is worth taking in Barth's three arguments against Deism, which also have application to political deism:

First, it overlooks the fact that a creature independent of the Creator and maintaining itself in life and movement would no longer be His creature but a second God. It thus ascribes to God the absurdity that He can and must cease to be the one and only God. Second, it overlooks the fact that it not only belongs to the nature of the creature, but constitutes its true honour, not merely occasionally but continuously to need and receive the assistance of God in its existence. Third, it overlooks the fact that the existence of even the most perfect creature is not an end in itself, but stands under a determination in relation to its Creator whose meaning is established and conditioned by the further dealings of the Creator towards and with it.¹¹⁵

In Barth's first point we can find the self-sacralization of the state, which in its godless preservation becomes a second god. This political deism reaches its logical endpoint in the total independence of the human as a scientific and political animal, whose social life is self-generated and is regenerated through human effort, without reference to God. Such an approach results in the secularization of the doctrine of preservation. This makes the state a preserver which parodies God's rôle as sustainer of all creation. For this reason, it is surprising that Milbank and Cavanaugh are so

114. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 48.

115. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III, The Doctrine of Creation, Part 3*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. Mackay et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), III,3 §48.

silent on this topic, since it is no less important a battleground between theologies and anti-theologies than creation and redemption, to which they devote more attention.

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The Instrumentalist State

The modern state has many means of preservation at its disposal. But what is it preserving society for? Does it merely provide the space in which individuals can work out their own meaning and perhaps salvation, or does it have an aim toward which it is heading? To follow Michael Oakeshott's metaphor, the state merely keeps society afloat:

In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion.¹¹⁶

In this way, a legitimising function of the modern state has been to preserve the basis of society from both internal and external threats. Such threats may come from other states, internal enemies, and also from criminals, but not all threats take personal form. Social unrest can come from economic inequality, epidemics, and natural disasters. The state seeks to eliminate or mitigate such threats so that society can operate and continue as before.

For such states, being those that merely have the means of preservation at their disposal, and no end towards which they direct society, it is only preservation that they can offer as salvation. By contrast, in Christianity we are preserved for salvation with the difference here lying in eschatology. The modern state provides preservation within a modern conception of time which has been de-eschatologized.¹¹⁷ Without an eschatological horizon, the political and the theological exists forever in the present. This secular de-eschatologized time-frame came from Christian theology in response to the delayed *parousia*, as the discussion above shows. In philosophical language, to move beyond present preservation requires a grand 'narrative of emancipation', which in the contemporary modern world does not have validity to justify contemporary action other than that which preserves.¹¹⁸ Thus, the modern state can aim at preserving society, but this will not satisfy everyone, some of

116. Michael Oakeshott, "Political Education," in *Rationalism in Politics: And Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 127.

117. Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*, 121.

118. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 48, 60.

whom wish to see the state serve society in a more proactive fashion, leading society forward. But to serve society means to assist society to reach its own independent aims, and such goals in a modern state are rarely coherently known.¹¹⁹

Aquinas would accept Oakeshott's metaphor of the ship, but would complete it in this fashion:

First of all, however, it must be noted that to govern is to guide what is governed in a suitable fashion to its proper end. Thus a ship is said to be governed when it is steered on its right course to port by the industry of the sailors. If, therefore, something is directed towards an end external to itself, as a ship is to harbour, the duty of its governor will be not only to preserve the thing itself, but also to guide it towards its final end; whereas if there were something with no end outside itself, then the sole task belonging to the ruler would be the preservation of the thing itself in perfect condition.¹²⁰

The similarities between Aquinas and Oakeshott deserve as much attention as the differences. In both examples, the temporal goods of preservation are shared between the ship forever at sea and the ship with a clear destination. This similarity recalls Augustine's writings on the temporal goods (including government) shared by the City of God and the City of Man.¹²¹ Cavanaugh has been criticized here for misreading Augustine and not having a satisfactory appreciation of the temporal good provided by the state for the preservation of society.¹²² The same might also be said of Milbank.

The Tension between Eschatology and Preservation

It remains to make a final assessment of the notion of the state in relation to the doctrine of preservation and how this judgment can be used to gauge the political theologies of both Milbank and Cavanaugh. As outlined above, a *prima facie* tension exists between secular understandings of preservation in relation to political organization, and also tensions within theology between doctrines of eschatology and preservation. The modern church exists in a time of tension between the already and the not yet. We live after the central event in history: the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. And in also living before Christ's return, we look both backwards to Christ, and forward to his return. The Christian's

119. This is observed by Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 5.

120. Aquinas, "De regimine principum," 39.

121. See Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.14–15, 17; Augustine, "On the Free Choice of the Will," in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.15; Augustine, *The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life*, trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher, vol. 56, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), I.20.37, I.21.39.

122. Shadle, "Cavanaugh on the Church," 255–262.

attitude toward the state exists within this tension, the ethical meaning of which is a conundrum.¹²³ Such a posture can have various modes, such as viewing the state as that which preserves us in human society for the return of Christ. This has been a predominant position in the tradition of Christian political thought. Another perspective sees the state as beholden to demonic powers that Christ will finally defeat upon his return. Still another view, which emphasizes a different eschatological vision, wishes to see the state as helping to usher in God's Kingdom.

Yet, both Milbank and Cavanaugh have a more or less realized eschatology within the present. This is why the state can easily be dismissed as having no part in salvation history, since it can play no determinative part in any future end point, since the end is already present. This contrasts with an eschatology which places our redemption in the future (whether near or far does not matter). There will be more on this in discussing their doctrines of redemption in the next chapter. Milbank and Cavanaugh narrate and give the facts of the development of the rise of the state, with a view to showing that the present and future will be like the past. They are not future-focussed, as traditionally Christian views typically are.

For someone like Jürgen Moltmann, the inherently conservative doctrine of preservation could even be seen as a theologization of a conservative secular doctrine of the preservation of the state, making Machiavelli the originator of the doctrine. Such a point inverts that of Carl Schmitt, who saw that the secular doctrines of the state derived from a secularization of the doctrine of preservation of society against chaos. The purpose of this chapter is not to come to a decision on either side of this debate, but merely to highlight what is at stake here. Yet, this raises, once again, the extent to which Milbank and Cavanaugh are committed to the views of Schmitt and Löwith that secular politics is nothing more than a secularized version of Christianity.

Alongside this emphasis on the preservation of the state lies the view that some injustice and human suffering is tolerable in order to preserve the social order. If the state is accepted as a means of preservation, then the means of the state must be accepted as well, as was outlined by Barth. A version of this view was expressed by Paul Ramsey:

We may not have taken seriously enough, in obedience to God's governance and judgment of a sinful world, our Christian responsibility also to articulate our thinking and discipline our action so as to preserve this world and not some other, and to preserve an orderly, even if unjust, social or legal system while we engage in the struggle for justice within it. This, too, is needed to maintain the fabric of man's life with fellow man, or a garment for covenant.¹²⁴

123. For an account of this see Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Vol. 1*, 39–47.

124. Ramsey, *Christian Ethics and the Sit-In*, 76.

Here Ramsey is willing to accept some injustice for the sake of order. If the necessity of preserving the existing social order is accepted, then, some would argue, this entails the suspension of the proclamation of Jesus's coming and a resignation to the realm of necessity over that of freedom.¹²⁵ Furthermore, at this point Milbank and Cavanaugh believe that the violence needed to uphold the state renders the state largely unacceptable from a Christian viewpoint.

Another position, which focusses on the initiative of God suggests that in God's preserving work God can use the state and rulers, even those like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, for God's purpose. Such a position would affirm that God is free to use the powers of this world for his purposes, and while it is correct to judge violence as against the will of God, God can use the sin of men for his ends, which is the redemption of all of Creation for his glorification. Aligned with this, theology must affirm the absolute prerogative of God in preserving Creation. As sovereign, God is also free to use whatever means he chooses to effect this sustenance of creation and his people. We must take care not to reject God's means out of hand, lest we fall foul of God's judgment. Consider Jeremiah 2:13:

for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

Following this metaphor, the people of Israel have rejected God's precious, life-saving water supply and have dug out cisterns in order to provide for themselves. Luther connects this passage with the works of human hands through which humanity tries to justify itself.¹²⁶ He identifies such works righteousness as idolatrous. This idolatry extends to how the work of human hands can be seen as displacing the true preservation that comes from God alone. This passage can be read as condemning two errors. Because true preservation through living water remains the prerogative of God, the first evil is to reject God's preserving water. Rejection of God's means of preservation – water – leads directly to the second error. This is to rely – having already rejected God's preservation – on humanity's own inadequate efforts at self-preservation. These human means risk becoming a sacred idol when they are attributed with the divine power to preserve society against the threat of chaos.¹²⁷

125. Paolo Virno, *Multitude between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e) foreign agents series (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 59–60.

126. Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology, Volume III: Prayers — Zeal*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), § 3886.

127. Calvin also sees idolatry as a central concern of the text in *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations: Volume 1*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 92–94.

This sacralization of the state runs counter to the traditional Christian position that our preservation depends on God alone, while allowing that the work of human hands can become God's means for the preservation of creation for divine ends.

That God's ends remain central in considering the doctrine of preservation is affirmed by Barth:

God has an aim for the creature when He preserves and accompanies it. His preservation and accompanying are as such a guiding, a leading, a ruling, an active determining of the being and activity of all the reality which is distinct from Himself. He directs it to the thing which in accordance with His good-pleasure and resolve, and on the basis of its creation, it has to do and to be in the course of its history in time; to the *telos* which has to be attained in this history. It is He Himself who has set for it this *telos*, and it is He who as Ruler guides it towards this *telos*.¹²⁸

Contrary to the rule of politicians, God's rule is to the end of ends, the redemption of all creation. Any other end must be either subservient to this end, as a penultimate end, or be in direct conflict with it. Rulers who merely preserve without an end in view may serve a useful interim purpose, but they ultimately achieve nothing. In contrast to Christian politics, which is a politics of ends, secular politics is purely about means. Yet, sometimes the means can create ends or become ends in themselves. Ellul states the problem in these terms: 'The means determine the ends, by assigning us ends that can be attained and eliminating those considered unrealistic because our means do not correspond to them.'¹²⁹ The problem is that in not having ends, we are left only with means which grow, unchecked by their utility for achieving an end. The means grow in search of an end which it never finds. Here we find, perhaps, a reason for the ever-expanding totalitarian state.¹³⁰

The Christian understanding of preservation is that preservation is for a further purpose, being future salvation by God and the renewal of all creation. As Helmut Thielicke writes that 'the physical safeguarding of existence is never an end in itself. It is subject to a pneumatic goal which God will accomplish in his elect people.'¹³¹ Modern politics, with its disavowal of eschatology, therefore posits preservation as salvation, while theology teaches preservation for salvation. Brunner puts it like this:

For one who lives in the knowledge and certainty of the Providence of God, what we were obliged to deny as a general truth comes true in his own life: for him the grace of preservation and the grace of redemption are one. For him this temporal life is part of the way to the eternal goal,

128. Barth, *CD III/3*, §49.3, 155.

129. Ellul, *Political Illusion*, 238.

130. *Ibid.*, 238–239.

131. Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Vol. 1*, 273.

therefore the preservation of the temporal life is by permission of God who arranges that he shall follow this path. He knows that he is preserved by God for redemption; he knows no other meaning of his existence than this, which is the whole meaning and the final meaning, *the Telos*, not *a Telos*.¹³²

This passage, in short, describes the difference between the secular and Christian view of political time. Some versions of the sacred state will stop here, being an autonomous sustainer for eternity. Others will proceed further and claim to bring redemption. This conclusion, that the state may remain forever in the task of preservation, does not exhaust the state's potential sacralization. It remains to consider in the next chapter how redemption and salvation is understood in relation to secular politics.

Conclusions

This chapter has considered the often neglected doctrine of preservation in relation to politics. The doctrine of preservation has not fared well in this scientific age where the world is often viewed as being sustained by forces that science aims at discovering. In like fashion political and social laws are often deemed to be enough to sustain political society. Contrary to these approaches, this chapter has taken preservation seriously as a work of God, it has investigated how this work relates to creation in general and the sustaining of human society in particular. Linking the doctrine of preservation to God's work has been a traditional Christian view, but one that, curiously, does not feature strongly in the work of Milbank and Cavanaugh.

There are several reasons for this neglect. An important one when judging the soundness of the theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh is the ongoing tension between the doctrines of preservation and eschatology. Milbank and Cavanaugh wish to compress the time for preservation, bringing the redemption into the present with a realized eschatology. This tension cannot be resolved by merely considering preservation on its own terms. Traditionally the doctrine has emphasized our preservation for redemption. For this reason, we cannot fully address one's doctrine of preservation unless one also considers one's doctrine of redemption, the subject of the next chapter.

132. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics, Vol. II*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 159. Here Brunner draws on 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:3.

Chapter 5

Redemption and the End of the State

This chapter completes the threefold treatment of creation, preservation, and redemption in their relation to the theological understanding of the modern state. Again, the competitive nature of the interpretation of the state's relationship to the present doctrine, redemption, will be at stake. Will the state be redeemed and have its place in the Kingdom of God? Does the state offer salvation to humanity, or does it stand in the way of our redemption? The discussion of such questions guides this chapter to the conclusion that the state is neither a redeemer nor an anti-redeemer (something which stands in the way of our redemption), or, in other words, the state is neither Christ nor the Antichrist.

Milbank and Cavanaugh are not the only theologians linking redemption and politics. Others view the good works of the state redemptively. Barth, for one, placed the state in the order of redemption. For Barth, salvation in Christ alone means that Christ does not need any helpers.¹ This may seem like an obvious truth, but it is worth repeating often because the Christian, formed in a church which teaches true redemption, can be seduced by non-Christian redemptive language. Christians, possibly more than non-Christians, are liable to fall victim to the claims of political redeemers, sometimes taking the form of a supplementary redemption to that of God.

That rulers are saviour figures is the true Christian approach, provided only that our ruler and judge is our Lord. This is seen in Isaiah 33:22:

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler,
the LORD is our king; he will save us.

In the book of Isaiah, this summary statement of God's rule serves as the conclusion to the issue of whether the Hebrew people will put their trust in God or

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 632.

their neighbouring nations.² In like fashion, this verse serves as a succinct summary of this chapter, both in what it affirms (the sole sovereignty of God as judge, ruler, king, and saviour) and in what it denies (that we have other rulers and saviours). When we accept a ruler other than Christ, then it follows that we are tempted to see that ruler as our saviour as well. Our ruler is our saviour and our saviour is our ruler. But this conclusion – that we reject the state as a saviour – does not justify the state as profane.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of redemption, addressing the issue of what it is we are saved from, and relating this to political redemption. A key point in this discussion is that redemption relates strongly to the diagnosis of the human condition. Having laid this basis for the discussion, the politics of redemption in Milbank and Cavanaugh are then outlined and contrasted. The final main section of the chapter looks into the politics of redemption in Christian tradition, in scripture and in the theology, with specific attention given to Barth and his placing the state in the order of redemption. Finally the relationship between notions of redemption and the welfare state are investigated.

Redemption in Doctrine and Scripture

Any treatment of political redemption must first consider the notion of the human need for redemption. All humans, at some time or other, feel unfulfilled and wish that things would be better, both in their own lives and in the world as a whole. They desire to be made whole, with all aspects of their life coming together in harmony. People wish to be saved from the threats that challenge their preferred way of life and favoured destiny. They also wish to be reconciled with others and live in harmony and peace with all of humanity. This holistic need for redemption drives one to find the most all-encompassing story of redemption, one that offers to transform all of life, in all aspects, permanently.

It is, therefore, clear that redemption links to our diagnosis of the human condition, with our chosen saviour being a good remedy for our perceived predicament. There are many competing analyses of the human condition and many redeemers offering to save us. These often take the shape of political ideologies which are comprehensive in the diagnosis and prescription for the human condition. Against these and other political saviours, the Christian analysis is unique: it does not rely on an intuitive sense of our fallenness, or the material conditions of life. Christianity affirms that humanity has sinned and faces the results of their sin in death, decay, and violence.³ Those who reject such Christian accounts of sin will necessarily provide an alternative account of the travail of human life. In secular politics the state is sometimes seen as the

2. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 604.

3. This is a common statement in many churches' confessional statements, supported with reference to Romans 6:23. See, for instance, The Bohemian Confession (1535), Article 4.

problem that ails humanity, standing in the way of human liberation and redemption. Then there are others who see politics and the state as offering redemption, a way of overcoming the chaos created by unrestrained human nature and unregulated human interaction. This is sometimes given a Christian colour, with the state as the redeemer, whether wholly or as a supplementary redeemer, sitting alongside Christ and playing an important rôle in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

The Language of Redemption

Given the importance of redemption and salvation in Christian theology, it is no surprise that we have a confusing array of terms for it. So, in discussing redemption we need to be aware of the parallels with other terms used both in theological discourse and in political language which closely mirrors that of theology. The words 'redemption,' 'salvation,' 'atonement,' 'reconciliation,' 'expiration,' 'liberation,' and 'deliverance,' are all used in scripture and are sometimes used as synonyms in theological writing.⁴ They are also commonly found in political speech, which alerts us to the theological flavour of much political thought.

Catholic theologian Gerald O'Collins focuses his attention on 'salvation and redemption', but notes in passing that St Anselm of Canterbury used the nouns *redemptio* and *liberatio* as synonyms, and the verbs *redimere* and *liberare* as equivalents.⁵ But, despite such similarities, care is required in the selection of terms to ensure that the initiative for our salvation stays with God. O'Collins, for example, warns of the use of 'reconciliation', because we need to recognize that the Bible uses terms in ways that do not always cohere with secular uses: 'Any speech drawn from human states of affairs does not simply apply to God's redemptive work towards sinful men and women.'⁶

'Atonement' is especially important here, for its root is the English 'at-one-ment', which indicates unity through making something whole. This at-one-ment has a parallel political meaning in Cavanaugh's salvation of humanity as the reunification that comes through the reconciliation of humanity and God in the Eucharist. Discussions of Christian salvation often focus on the means of redemption rather than the ends. This can be seen readily in the history of the term 'atonement', which has gone from being mainly to do with the unity (at-one-ment) we receive in Jesus Christ, to the work of Jesus's atoning sacrifice and how this functions to save us.⁷ This understanding of what redemption results in will be important for assessing Milbank's and Cavanaugh's proposals.

4. See, for examples from scripture and tradition, Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–7.

5. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

6. *Ibid.*, 15.

7. On this background see Robert S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments: The Relation of the Atonement to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1960), 17–32.

The Politics of Redemption in Milbank and Cavanaugh

Where do Milbank and Cavanaugh stand in relation to the state and redemption? They reject the state as saviour, and seek salvation in the Body of Christ and out of the clutches of the state. But there is a twist here: they both place salvation and politics within the church, since for them soteriology and politics are both ecclesially-based. While, in their opinion, the state is neither redeemed nor redeemer, this does not make the state profane in itself. Rather, they hold that it is because it is profane that we need to be saved from it.

Milbank's Pluralist Salvation

Milbank has a very dim view of the current status of the modern world. As shown in Chapter 3, Milbank locates the origins of the modern world's sin and death in the rise of the secular. It follows that for Milbank that, 'Salvation from sin must mean "liberation" from cosmic, political, economic and psychic *dominium*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*, or temporal interval between the Fall and the final return of Christ.'⁸ Elsewhere he writes: 'it is quite precisely the *political* order (the order of the *polis*) that we are to be saved *from*.'⁹ Milbank sees the state as an anti-redeemer, but for him it's more than an obstacle to redemption; it is the profane thing we need saving from. In Milbank's politicized theology, 'the central aspect of salvation is the creation of perfect community.'¹⁰ For Milbank, everything else related to salvation follows from this, including the analysis of what we are redeemed from, and how this is enacted. In his opinion, our political fall occurred in the rise of the absolute sovereignty of the profane state and its maintenance of 'simple space' which sits 'suspended between the mass of atomic individuals on the one hand, and an absolutely sovereign centre on the other.'¹¹ Against this atomizing vision, Milbank posits salvation coming through the dissolution of absolute state sovereignty and the reintroduction of Gothic complex space and the recapture of the social rôle of the church.¹² Milbank's political soteriology is, therefore, a mirror image of the rise of the state described in Chapter 3.

To recapitulate, Milbank's 'desire is merely to undermine not only the sacral aura, but also its long-extended shadow – the secular legitimacy – of coercive power. And to insist that salvation is precisely, *out of* this political domain which constantly reproduces "original" sin.'¹³ For Milbank, salvation is out of the state and to be found in the *societas perfecta* of the church, but the church is understood in a broad sense of the

8. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 394. Milbank's italics.

9. Milbank, "Essay against Secular Order," 209. Milbank's italics.

10. John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 345.

11. Milbank, "On Complex Space," 275.

12. *Ibid.*, 275–276.

13. Milbank, "Essay against Secular Order," 220. Milbank's italics.

extended Body of Christ, and certainly not limited to mere church-going. Mirroring his complex space, he describes the vehicles of salvation: ‘There *has been*, we must believe, salvation in monasteries, in parishes, in families, in separatist communities, in guilds, in trade unions.’¹⁴ Because such a salvation requires making and sustaining the space in which this can happen, Milbank writes that, ‘The Church, in order to be the Church, must seek to extend the sphere of socially aesthetic harmony – “within” the State where this is possible’.¹⁵

In order to undermine the state’s claim to absolute sovereignty, Milbank advocates both distributism and pluralism. To Milbank, unlike some pluralists, associations do not mediate *between* the individual and the state, but exist alongside it and undermine its claims to absolute sovereignty.¹⁶ To Milbank, associations which merely mediate between the individual and the state remain under the state, to which Milbank attributes a wish ‘to exterminate all “intermediate associations” between itself and the individual’.¹⁷ Furthermore, Milbank understands the church to have an international dimension that entails an independence from the claims of the state.¹⁸

Milbank’s notion of salvation for is that it society moves from state domination, and transforms into what he calls Gothic complex space, characterized by a matrix of overlapping associations. It is for this reason that Milbank, following the work of the English pluralists and other Christian socialists, advocates the re-establishment of guilds. To Maurice B. Reckitt and C. E. Bechhofer, ‘The establishment of National Guilds involves the abolition of the wage-system, the attainment of self-government in industry, and the modification of State sovereignty.’¹⁹ This aligns with Milbank’s hopes for his advocacy of guilds, which is not simply the development of associations, but aims at a political and economic revolution.

Having outlined Milbank’s position of the state from which we are redeemed, and how we are redeemed out of it, we can now turn to some criticisms of his position.

Central to Milbank’s proposed expansion of civil society, is that it comes at the expense of the sovereignty of the state. As the sphere of just exchange grows it must necessarily take away from the sphere of the market/state and reclaim the ground lost with the expansion of the state. This notion rests behind Milbank’s support for the Big Society – a flagship programme of the Conservative Party under David Cameron’s leadership. From the start of his premiership, Cameron’s concern was the ‘size, scope

14. Milbank, “Essay against Secular Order,” 221. Milbank’s italics.

15. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 428.

16. On the undermining potential of pluralism see George Schwab, “Introduction,” in *The Concept of the Political*, Expanded, by Carl Schmitt, trans., with an introduction by George Schwab, with a foreword by Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12..

17. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 231, 410.

18. John Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 286.

19. Maurice B. Reckitt and C. E. Bechhofer, *The Meaning of National Guilds* (London: C. Palmer & Hayward, 1918), xii.

and role of the state'.²⁰ It was also clear that, from its adoption, the notion of the Big Society was linked to cutting the deficit and about being able 'to deliver more for less'.²¹ This has led to scepticism about whether the programme is really about finding ways to cut welfare state spending. This is just one problem for the Big Society agenda, which has failed to capture the public imagination, partly because it is considered vague. Economic issues aside, Cameron also sees the Big Society programme about the 'redistribution of power away from the central state to local communities'.²² This is where the best connection between the Conservative programme and Milbank's pluralism exists: in the pluralist concern with limiting of the power of the state by giving more power to other associations in society.²³

In Milbank's vision of a new society, he problematically combines political pluralism with philosophical monism. He seeks in pluralism the complex space which is denied by the state, which claims sovereignty over all of society. But this cannot be a plurality of ends, for he wishes to see all things turned toward God. Milbank advocates political pluralism, while disliking religious pluralism. Can this be consistent? The problem is that if politics is essentially an expression of a *mythos*, then political pluralism can exist only as a manifestation of a deeper 'religious' pluralism. This issue lies at the heart of the type of pluralism that Milbank thinks society should reflect – this is the pluralism of means, not a pluralism of ends. But is a viable position to hold? Reckitt commented that the synthetic matrix of groups in Christendom 'has been replaced by the kaleidoscope of the modern world, with its maze of purely self-regarding associations' in business, professional bodies, unions, and universities.²⁴ Groups in the modern world do not, according to Reckitt, operate as they would in Christendom, since there is no 'accepted end to which their interests can be subordinated'.²⁵ Groups, for Reckitt, are atomistic collections of individuals with self-regarding ends.²⁶ This remains a major problem for Milbank's pluralism. To what end are his proposed guilds and the voluntary societies of the Big Society directed? Is this the creation of an anonymous Christendom, in which they are all directed to God?

Milbank's adoption of the philosophy of pluralism has unfortunate consequences for his anti-individualist position. To Carl Schmitt, political pluralism is inherently individualistic, in that it has no centre other than the individual. When faced with

20. David Cameron, "The Big Society," *Conservatives*, November 10, 2009, <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/David_Cameron_The_Big_Society.aspx> (accessed April 23, 2013).

21. David Cameron, "Our 'Big Society' plan," *Conservatives*, March 31, 2010, <http://www.conservatives.com/news/speeches/2010/03/david_cameron_our_big_society_plan.aspx> (accessed April 23, 2013).

22. *Ibid.*

23. On pluralism and the Big Society see Rodney Barker, "Big Societies, Little Platoons and the Problems with Pluralism," *The Political Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (January–March 2011): 50–55.

24. Reckitt, "Religion and Politics," 137.

25. *Ibid.*, 138.

26. *Ibid.*, 138–139.

competing claims, 'One association is played off against another and all questions and conflicts are decided by individuals.'²⁷ For a theologian, this entity would have to be the church, representing Christ, whose sovereign claims outweigh all others. So, for instance, where a trade union suggests to its members that the church is part of the capitalist superstructure and should not be attended, this conflicts with a church which teaches that a union is part of secular humanist communism. The church might further teach that it is not in the hands of the individual to negotiate the waters of these competing claims, but in submission to church teaching, the worker should follow the church's advice.²⁸ Pope Leo XIII addressed this very situation in *Rerum Novarum*: 'Under these circumstances Christian working men must do one of two things: either join associations in which their religion will be exposed to peril, or form associations among themselves and unite their forces so as to shake off courageously the yoke of so unrighteous and intolerable an oppression.'²⁹ But even here, the task of judging whether their religion is threatened seems to lie with the individual.

Schmitt's objection, that pluralism is individualistic, can be applied to Milbank because his associations are voluntary or free, with some notable exceptions. Milbank points out that in antiquity, the three main associations were not voluntary: 'the familial, the tribal and the political communities'.³⁰ Milbank claims that the church, by being the first free association (one joined voluntarily), invented the 'social world'.³¹ According to Milbank, Christianity's social innovation was to develop the idea of having a space of free association, with 'people coming together for all kinds of shared purposes of organisation and running their lives'.³² So whereas one did not choose one's initial nationality, citizenship, or family, one could choose to be a member of a church. Yet, elsewhere, Milbank questions too much church freedom. He simultaneously advocates for compulsory membership of parishes and membership of free associations. In the past, compulsory associations included the parish structure and compulsory guild membership and political affiliation, such as bondage to a Lord or King.³³ Against churches based on communities of special interests which overlap parish boundaries, Milbank favours the inclusion of all people into parishes:

27. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Expanded, trans., with an introduction by George Schwab, with a foreword by Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 45. On the individualism of pluralism also see Harold J. Laski, "The Sovereignty of the State," in *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 24.

28. This example is from Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 41.

29. Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," ¶ 54.

30. John Milbank, "Christian Vision of Society Puts Economics and Politics in Their Place," ABC Religion & Ethics, December 8, 2011, <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/12/08/3386474.htm>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Harold J. Laski makes this point that until the Reformation the church was a compulsory form of association in the West. See "The Pluralistic State," *The Philosophical Review* 28, no. 6 (November 1919): 564.

In this manner the logic of parish organization is simply the logic of ecclesiology itself: the way for the Church to include all is to operate the cure of souls in such and such a specific area. It is pure geography encompasses all without exception.³⁴

Arguably, Milbank's concern is that the church should discipline itself by adopting a strict parish structure and offer an alternative to the complex space of fragmented ecclesiologies, where church-goers become consumers in the religious market-place. But this must clash with his notion that the church is a free association.

Regarding guilds, which were also compulsory in medieval times, it is a criticism of contemporary advocacy of guilds that they are monopolistic and restrict freedom.³⁵ In reply to this problem, Milbank more latterly has advocated 'free guilds'.³⁶ Presumably, individuals will decide to join them or not, in just the same way they are free to join churches. Milbank says individuals are better off in groups, giving the example of the benefits of wage negotiations through unions, rather than standing alone and vulnerable before an employer. But ultimately here the sovereignty of the individual reigns supreme, rather than the union.³⁷

If Milbank's proposals for the advancement of associations were successful and the state was undermined, then the consequences may expose a sound reason why the state arose in the first place. This is to arbitrate between groups in society. Christopher Morris argues that in a stateless society we would not fear the state or other people, but groups led by ambitious individuals seeking power.³⁸ This is especially the case where groups can claim absolute sovereignty over even a part of life. This threat from groups provides one reason why a state can be justified: to arbitrate, not between sovereign wills of individuals, but between groups. This is obscured in Milbank and Cavanaugh by their adherence to Hobbessian contractarianism in describing the origins of the modern state.

A further practical problem with pluralism is in explaining why the state would voluntarily cede sovereignty back to the associations from whom it was taken in the first place.³⁹ Robert L. Carneiro writes that there must be some 'external constraint' for sovereignty to be given away.⁴⁰ Milbank is aware of this dynamic in relation to civil liberties: 'the self-interest of power will be reluctant to concede once more an advantage that it has already gained'.⁴¹ But he is blind to this problem in his major

34. Milbank, "Stale Expressions," 273.

35. See Thomas E. Woods Jr., *Beyond Distributism* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2008), 51–61.

36. John Milbank, "The Real Third Way: For a New Metanarrative of Capital," in *Crunch Time: A Call to Action*, ed. Angus Ritchie (London: The Contextual Theology Centre, 2010), 82–83.

37. Milbank, "Christian Vision of Society."

38. Morris, *An Essay on the Modern State*, 11–12.

39. Cavanaugh is critical of those who ask the state to 'destatize' in Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 194.

40. See Robert L. Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," in *The Politicization of Society*, ed. Kenneth S. Templeton Jr. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), 33.

41. Milbank, "Paul against Biopolitics," 129.

political proposal. Cynics about the Big Society, this being the closest tangible political form Milbank's ideas have taken, are apt to think that the 'external constraint' here in the devolution of services to local communities is fiscal, with the government wishing to make cuts in social spending.⁴²

In understanding one way in which the state might give away its sovereignty, it helps to make use of the distinction between the size and the scope of the state. Francis Fukuyama writes that *scope* 'refers to the different functions and goals taken on by governments', while *strength* (also called state or institutional capacity) is the 'ability of states to plan and execute policies and to enforce laws cleanly and transparently'.⁴³ The sorts of functions which fall under *scope* include law and order, public health, education, and wealth redistribution. It is more difficult to measure the strength of states, which can vary across functions, but measures of corruption, and other indicators, such as those that measure human rights and legal justice, go some way to measure this.⁴⁴ It is possible, as the example of New Zealand shows, for a state to reduce its scope while becoming stronger.⁴⁵ By applying this useful schema to pluralist attempts of the moderation of state sovereignty, we can see that simply involving community groups in the delivery of government functions may well limit the scope of the state, but if these functions remain monitored and policed by the state, the state's strength and overall grip on society can be increased.

A final problem for Milbank's proposals are the international dimension, which he ignores. Rearranging sovereignty *within* societies cannot be separated from international relations. Philip Watson observes that 'internal and external affairs . . . are not ultimately separable, and a loss of authority over the one inevitably means some weakening in the other.'⁴⁶ Adopting internal political pluralism may be the equivalent of unilateral disarmament, if the state is weakened greatly. It would be foolish to expect that any modern state would do this voluntarily. Bodin would agree, suggesting that whatever sovereignty the prince gives away, he keeps much more to himself and remains in control.⁴⁷ The Big Society vision of Milbank falters at this point of wishful thinking that the state will either cede its hard-won sovereignty, or let it be spirited away by community groups.

Whereas Milbank primarily advocates salvation *from* the state through political pluralism, in his more recent political activism and advocacy, the state becomes instrumental for the rejuvenation of redemptive complex space. For Milbank, the

42. Ben Kisby, "The Big Society: Power to the People?" *The Political Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (October 2010): 485–487.

43. Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 9.

44. On measuring scope and strength see *ibid.*, 10–15.

45. *Ibid.*, 18–19.

46. Philip S. Watson, *The State as a Servant of God: A Study of its Nature and Tasks* (London: SPCK, 1946), 5.

47. Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from The Six Books of the Commonwealth*, ed. and trans. Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

state is neither redeemer nor anti-redeemer, but a dialectical mixture of the two which sometimes sits in between. Political salvation, on this account, comes neither from state nor market, but through the complex space of intermediate institutions.⁴⁸ Milbank is more politically statist than Cavanaugh here. While Cavanaugh is more of an anarchist, Milbank is a polyarchist⁴⁹, with a limited state alongside other sovereign associations. For Milbank, the state can play a negative or positive rôle in permitting the development of these other institutions to come about. But is Milbank too optimistic about the state's potential to bring about the end of its own tyranny through facilitating its reduction in raw power by giving it away to the third sector?

Milbank's politics of the Body of Christ extends beyond the church, with a focus on civil society. It is worth considering whether Milbank will get to his social vision of a more complexified space. Milbank, along with his disciple Red Tory Phillip Blond, seems willing to adopt statecraft to realign society. Both the church and the family, as two Christian societies, have a rôle to spread outwards into society at large as a positive force for salvation:

And such extensions of family must invade also the entire realm of law and punishment. The Church should promote the sense that such processes must be processes of penance and reconciliation as well as of justice. It must have done forever with Luther's two kingdoms, and the notion that a State that does not implicitly concern itself with the soul's salvation can be in any way legitimate.⁵⁰

Milbank, then, thinks that a *telos* is necessary for the direction of society. It should at least be concerned with the soul's salvation. If so, then a question arises about the relation of Milbank's advocacy of 'complex space' to the unity of society. Does this society have a unified direction? Or does a complex society merely offer here the opportunity for people to determine their own direction? As Milbank describes complex space, it is not a plurality of interests, but, rather, overlapping spheres of authority, not with differing goals, but with different prerogatives. Milbank is critical of associations that are merely interest groups, and do not offer true encounters with those who are genuinely different, since this does not indicate a vibrant community, but rather a breakdown in community, as people withdraw from each other into interest groups, with little interaction with the stranger.⁵¹

In bringing about this non-statist community of associations, both Milbank and Blond, as shown above, are willing to make use of the state. Using the state as a means

48. Milbank's analysis is reminiscent of Kropotkin's in Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role*, Rev. ed. Trans. Vernon Richards and Freedom Press (London: Freedom, 1987).

49. This term is taken from Barker, "The Discredited State," 169.

50. John Milbank, "Culture: The gospel of affinity," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 209.

51. This point is made as a criticism of interest-group churches in Milbank, "Stale Expressions," 271.

of social change is advocated by both the Red Tory and Blue Labour movements, of which Milbank is a part.⁵² Both groups are willing to use the state as a temporary means in order to divest the state of its power as part of bringing about a more socialist society.⁵³ The Manifesto of ResPublica decries the rise of the 'centralised authoritarian state' and promises a renewal of society through the means of existing social structures: 'In order to reclaim a civilised society, market and state should not be regarded as the ultimate goal or expression of humanity. They are the means by which we achieve our end; they are not the end itself.'⁵⁴ This fits with the politics of Milbank – that the government can be used to divest social initiative from the state and relocate it in guilds, unions and other associations. It must be stated clearly that this differs from red socialism, which wants to absorb all things into the state.⁵⁵ Whereas Milbank remains more closely associated with Blue Labour, he is involved with both, and sees them as belonging in the same broadly pluralist tradition.⁵⁶ In an interview about his politics, Milbank described what he sees as the common ground between the two movements: 'Red Tories and Blue Labourites reject both the deontology of the right and the utilitarianism of the left in favor of the view that state, society, and economy must all see their role as the building up of individual and relational flourishing—of honor and virtue.'⁵⁷

Cavanaugh and Eucharistic Salvation

More than any other contemporary political theologian, William Cavanaugh offers a politicized account of salvation, with soteriology marking a clear distinction between the church and state. In contrast to Barth, who places the state in the order of redemption (see page 160 below), Cavanaugh sees the state as being a parody of the true redeemer, which draws people away from our true redeemer. On this

52. Milbank is a trustee of the Red Tory think-tank ResPublica, see ResPublica, "Advisors and Trustees," ResPublica, January 1, 2012, <<http://www.respublica.org.uk/authors/4>> (accessed April 23, 2013). He also contributes to discussions about the fortunes of Blue Labour, see Blue Labour, "Blue Labour Midlands seminar," Blue Labour, May 21, 2012, <<http://www.bluelabour.org/2012/05/21/blue-labour-midlands-seminar/>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

53. On 'Red Tory' see the book by Milbank's former student, Blond, *Red Tory*. Milbank, a Fellow of Blond's think-tank ResPublica, is acknowledged in this work for his 'editorial enthusiasm'. A sympathetic account of Blue Labour is given in Rowenna Davis, *Tangled up in Blue: Blue Labour and the Struggle for Labour's Soul*, with a foreword by Steve Richards (London: Ruskin Publishing, 2011).

54. ResPublica, "ResPublica Manifesto," ResPublica, c. 2009, <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/15126312/ResPublica_Manifesto.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2013).

55. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Samuel Moore (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 80–81.

56. For accounts of the similarities and differences between Red Tory and Blue Labour see Phillip Blond and Maurice Glasman, "The Prospect Debate: Red Tory vs Blue Labour," *Prospect*, April 30, 2010, <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/04/the-prospect-debate-red-tory-vs-blue-labour/>> (accessed April 23, 2013), and Malcolm Brown, "Red Tory and Blue Labour: More Theology Needed," *Political Theology* 13, no. 3 (2012).

57. Nathan Schneider and John Milbank, "Orthodox Paradox: An Interview with John Milbank," *The Immanent Frame*, March 17, 2010, <<http://blogs.ssrrc.org/tif/2010/03/17/orthodox-paradox-an-interview-with-john-milbank/>> (accessed April 23, 2013).

account, the state offers a false soteriology based in the social contract, whereby the Leviathan saves individuals from the war of all against all. But since, according to Cavanaugh, the state is formed and sustained in violence, it can only bring us more of the same, and not the true redemption of the Body of Christ. This section outlines the different soteriologies of church and state and also Cavanaugh's account of the political salvation found in the Eucharist.

Chapter 3 described how Cavanaugh contrasts the common origins of church and state in offering different soteriologies. For Cavanaugh, both church and state offer to save humans from their separation (whether found in sin or the original individuality of the state of nature) and bring them together into a peaceful co-existence.⁵⁸ The modern state also seeks, in the view of Cavanaugh, to save humanity from religious wars by making religion a purely private thing without any public or political importance. Cavanaugh's position is that the state, in offering a false salvation, is a false redeemer.

The state, in being described as a false redeemer, provides another way to view it as an antichrist in Cavanaugh's theology.⁵⁹ For Cavanaugh, the state fails to save us from violence and separation, yet its true profanity is shielded from us by the political imaginary of statism, which promotes the state as a form of political messiah.

Given the prominence of state violence in the world, it may be asked why this fact is not more widely appreciated. This may have to do with the apparent failure of Christ to bring salvation, creating a salvific vacuum which draws in alternative saviours such as the Antichrist. In the words of René Girard, 'The Antichrist boasts of bringing to human beings the peace and tolerance that Christianity promised but has apparently failed to deliver.'⁶⁰ This is an eschatological critique of Christianity insofar as Christ promises peace, but there remains war, hatred, and human division. So why not look elsewhere for the salvation that is promised, but remains unrealized? This is what the state offers, according to Cavanaugh: a false salvation, that not only Christ has failed to bring, but religion in general has necessitated through its wars.

Cavanaugh's emphasis on the irreconcilable competition between the salvation of the state and the salvation of God is necessary for his theology because a statistimagination may tempt us to believe that the former is merely the salvation from political, social, economic, physical, and environmental threats in this life, while God saves our soul in the next. This is clearly wrong for Cavanaugh, since the gospels attest to a comprehensive salvation that challenges the truthfulness of others' claims to even physical salvation.

For Cavanaugh, our salvation is found in the forming of the social body of the church through the Eucharist. In this way, political redemption is central to

58. See page 76ff. above.

59. A comparison between the violent origins of both the state and Antichrist was made in Chapter 3 at page 80 above.

60. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 181.

Cavanaugh's ecclesiology. The church saves by reversing the splintering of humanity by binding humanity together into the Body of Christ. For Cavanaugh, humanity is reconciled in the Eucharist, which links the reconciliation of humanity to itself and to God. Cavanaugh quotes Matthew 26:27–28 to this effect: 'Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."' ⁶¹ Cavanaugh supplements the simple gospel account with the instructions from *The Didache* that instruct the congregation to be 'reconciled' to one another before partaking of the Eucharist. ⁶² The Eucharist produces reconciliation, but also forgiveness, through demanding 'a real unity among people now,' since prior to partaking of the Eucharist one must forgive and receive forgiveness. ⁶³

In describing the body that the Eucharist makes, Cavanaugh favours the 'true' body of Christ (*corpus verum*) rather than the mystical body of Christ (*corpus mysticum*): 'The designation of the church as "mystical" rather than "true" body of Christ has often served the imagination of a disincarnate church which hovers above the temporal, uniting Christians in soul while the body does its dirty work.' ⁶⁴ Cavanaugh wishes to assert the tangibility of the real physical body of the church, as an incarnation of the Body of Christ. This physical presence would provide a counter to the argument that the church is private, as evidenced by existing only in the souls and minds of believers.

As the Body of Christ, the church, as Cavanaugh understands it, has its own political existence independent of the state. It does not rely on the state for its existence, but it is a body in its own right. Such an ontological statement is important if one wishes to ground the church as its own political body. William Cunningham makes a similar point in his study of Augustine:

But for S. Austin the kingdom of God was . . . an actual Polity, just as the Roman Empire was a Polity too: it was "visible" in just the same way as the earthly State, for it was a real institution with definite organisation, with a recognised constitution, with a code of laws and means of enforcing them, with property for its uses, and officers to direct it. ⁶⁵

This is at core what Cavanaugh's sacramental ecclesiology aims at showing: that the church is a political body in its own right. His criticism of statistpolitics is not simply that the state has grown, but that the church no longer sees itself as an independent political power in competition with the state.

61. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 238.

62. Andrew Louth, ed., "The Didache," in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1987), § 14.

63. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 238.

64. *Ibid.*, 207.

65. W. Cunningham, *S. Austin and His Place in the History of Christian Thought*, Hulsean Lectures 1885 (London: C. J. Clay & Sons, 1886), 116. 'Austin' is an archaic English contraction of Augustine, see Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine*, Abingdon Pillars of Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1.

The reasons for why Cavanaugh wishes to affirm the true, and not mystical, Body of Christ should be apparent by now. The mystical body lacks the personality and physical nature of a true political body. With only a mystical body, Cavanaugh claims that, 'The church does not have a political body but only a religious body, a *mystical* body, which unites all Christians above the rough and tumble of the temporal.'⁶⁶ Cavanaugh links the notion of *corpus mysticum* with *persona ficta* as both used by Innocent IV, who, according to his sources, is the origin of the notion.⁶⁷

The competition between church and state is around their unification of people. This occurs, as Cavanaugh explains it through the respective liturgies of church and state.⁶⁸ In his use of the term 'liturgy', Cavanaugh wishes to reclaim the original meaning of liturgy as *leitourgia*, citing Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann to the effect that 'an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals.'⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Cavanaugh acknowledges that his politics of the Eucharist will only have resonance with Christian churches with strong liturgical traditions.⁷⁰

The Eucharist is not the only thing that unifies. Reformed theology may also find in baptism, the preaching of the word, the recital of the creed, and communal prayer and confession liturgical elements that bring unity to the church. Cavanaugh seems to limit liturgy to the Eucharist alone, as that which makes the unified Body of Christ.

Theologically speaking, the 'body' conjures up the image of the incarnation, the embodiment of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth. But we must remember that the church cannot be captured in only one metaphor, for why would Paul use several of them if one would suffice? There remain several other metaphors of church that can also carry political importance.⁷¹ Understanding the church as the Body of Christ is not a universal practice. In fact, care needs to be taken with this (as with every metaphor). The risks in this metaphor are that christology, being integral to the metaphor itself, becomes distorted. While christology and ecclesiology are closely linked in Cavanaugh, the linkage may be too close. The danger is that the Church becomes Christ, risking the deification of the church. Joseph Ratzinger warned against identifying the church with Christ:

The "Body of Christ" idea was developed in the Catholic Church in the sense that some theologians liked to call the Church the "continuation of Christ's life on earth", and the Church was described as the ongoing incarnation of the Son until the end of time. This elicited opposition

66. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 79.

67. *Ibid.*, 218.

68. William T. Cavanaugh, "The Liturgies of Church and State," *Liturgy* 20 (2005): 25–30.

69. Cited in Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 12.

70. *Ibid.*, 15.

71. For examples see: Paul Sevier Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960); Avery Robert Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed. (Garden City: Image Books, 1987, 2002).

from Protestants, who saw in this an intolerable self-identification of the Church with Christ, in which the Church, so to speak, worshipped herself and claimed to be infallible. Gradually, however, Catholic thinkers too, found—without going quite so far—that this formula ascribed to all the official acts and utterances of the Church a definitive character that made any criticism appear to be an attack on Christ himself and simply overlooked what is human, all too human, in the Church.⁷²

Avery Dulles has also expressed concerns about the divinization of the church, but his main problem with the body of Christ metaphor is pneumatological. If the Holy Spirit is taken as the 'life principle' of the church, any action the church takes becomes the work of the Holy Spirit. 'This would obscure the personal responsibility and freedom of the members, and would make the presence of sin and error in the Church—even on the corporate and official level—unintelligible.'⁷³ With potentially both Christ and the Holy Spirit running into trouble in the Body of Christ metaphor of the church, what might be lacking is a sacramental understanding of the church that points to the Trinitarian God of Father, Son, and Spirit. This is what other metaphors of the church may function as: a balancing of the metaphor of the Body of Christ. Calling the church the real body of Christ also runs into other doctrinal problems. The doctrine of ascension affirms that Jesus's body is in heaven. If this is not Christ's body, then does Cavanaugh demand a distinction between Jesus and Christ? Then there is the *Parousia* – the return to Earth of Christ's body. It cannot return if it never left or exists among us already.⁷⁴ These problems demand that we not take the church as the Body of Christ literally.

Cavanaugh has a different position from Milbank. Whereas Milbank has high praise for political pluralism, Cavanaugh only shares with this position a desire to have a church with real personality. Cavanaugh's criticisms of pluralism are revealed in his long discussion of Jacques Maritain, an advocate of political pluralism in *True Humanism*, a work which had great influence in Chile.⁷⁵ Being more of an anarchist than both Jacques Maritain and Milbank, it is not surprising that Cavanaugh's main objection to pluralism is the rôle that it retains for the state. Cavanaugh also thinks it a fantasy that the state will divest itself of power.⁷⁶

One reason he offers for this is the language the early church used to describe itself:

72. Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 24–25.

73. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 47.

74. The identification of Christ and the church ran into this and other problems according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 140.

75. Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, trans. M. R. Adamson (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1938), 156–158.

76. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 194–195.

The early Christians borrowed the term *ekklesia* or “assembly” from the Greek city-state, where *ekklesia* meant the assembly of all those with citizen rights in a given city. The early Christians thus refused the available language of guild or association (such as *koinon*, *collegium*) and asserted that the church was not gathered around particular interests, but was interested in all things; it was an assembly of the whole.⁷⁷

Adopting this approach, Cavanaugh rejects the notion that the church is either *polis* or *oikos*, because in their original use these terms were considered mutually exclusive, with an individual belonging to the former as a citizen, or, by being a women, child, or slave, consigned to the latter.⁷⁸ Cavanaugh distances himself from the politics of civil society by using the word *ekklesia* for church, which, to him, is more universal.

But this usage, which is at the foundation of his notion of the political church, holds a problem for Cavanaugh. This problem is whether the church can escape the governmentality which pervades society. While Cavanaugh is firm that the church cannot be merely part of the voluntary sector, it is unclear how the church escapes being subject to the same statist *mythos* that troubles the associations in civil society.⁷⁹ Cavanaugh’s treatment does not allow space for non-state-directed organisations within civil society. Obvious examples of such organisations would be trade unions, schools, the church and clubs, and, in former times, guilds and so on – the very things that Milbank finds in complex space.⁸⁰ But Cavanaugh treats all of these as orientated toward the state. He marshals Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Hardt, and Hegel as witnesses to support the view that the state dominates all aspects of social life.⁸¹ While Cavanaugh acknowledges that, ‘Intermediate associations such as the church, unions, and the family still exist,’ he notes that ‘they are expected to convey identities, virtues, and common ends in a context in which their relationships to production, mutual aid, education, and welfare have been absorbed into the state and market.’⁸² A question here for Cavanaugh is whether the church’s absorption by the state/market means that his solution for an ecclesiastically-based ‘true politics’ is meaningful. Is there a contradiction in Cavanaugh in that there is no sphere of action outside the discipline of the state? Has the church really escaped the statism that has plagued civil society? And if it has, why have all other associations succumbed to the state? In Cavanaugh’s final analysis, we are left with church and state, with everything that is not church effectively being the state. There remains no sphere for civil society or a place outside either of these in which to mediate between them. Such a view is deeply

77. Cavanaugh, “Is Public Theology Really Public?” 117. Cavanaugh’s italics.

78. Ibid., 117.

79. This point is from Peter Dula, “Fugitive Ecclesia,” in *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*, ed. Chris K. Huebner and Tripp York, with a foreword by John Milbank (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 117–118.

80. See Milbank, “On Complex Space.”

81. Cavanaugh, “Is Public Theology Really Public?” 113–114.

82. Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 258.

problematic for those political and public theologians that wish to ground Christian politics in civil society or attempt to be non-statist.

Cavanaugh has done a great service in reminding us that the church should not be placed alongside other voluntary organisations in a flattened civil society. For Joseph Ratzinger, what is important here is the church's self-understanding in the face of a pluralistic society. The church should resist being placed in the 'Pantheon of all possible value systems' for this would be the church's denial of the truth of faith.⁸³ But there are problems with Cavanaugh's understanding of these issues. Foremost is whether he can be consistent with his search for alternatives to the market and state, given that there is no longer any space in which this can happen. The re-complexification of space (as Milbank describes it) requires grounding this somewhere. Without the destruction of the state, it is difficult to see where this grounding can take place, apart from inside the church.

This reconciliation (Cavanaugh's at-one-ment) is the only form redemption takes in his thought. It is the re-membering of the Body of Christ, or the reunification of splintered humanity. This emphasis on salvation as unity raises the question of whether Cavanaugh merely poses redemption as the restoration of humanity's unified state in creation, as a restoration of paradise lost. Such a teaching ignores the destiny of creation moving beyond its createdness. If so, then Cavanaugh rejects a future eschatology in favour of a realized eschatology in which the church is a pathway to the return to paradise. But is this all we need to be saved from: radical separation from one another? What about sin? Cavanaugh does not write on sin apart from his understanding of the unity of all humanity in both creation and redemption: 'Not individuals but the human race as a whole is created and redeemed.'⁸⁴ The unity represented by the first Adam enables him to say (using Romans 5:12) that 'sin came into the world through one man'. Adam represents humanity as a whole. Cavanaugh draws on Henri de Lubac who writes 'every breach with God, is at the same time a disruption of human unity.'⁸⁵ Henri de Lubac, emphasising the oneness, cites Irenaeus in his emphasis of the oneness of faith: 'there is but one God the Father, and one Logos the son, and one Spirit, and one salvation only for all who believe in him.'⁸⁶

Cavanaugh also enters into the debate as to whether sin is individual, social, or both, since, for him, these ontological categories are the fruit of sin itself. The profane state consists of individuals, while the political church must resist the idea it is simply a collection of individuals: 'At the heart of the modern reluctance to see the church as itself a type of politics is the inability to see it as more than a gathering of individuals,

83. Joseph Ratzinger, "A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?: On the Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern World," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 206.

84. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 11.

85. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 33.

86. *Ibid.*, 32.

who are assumed to be the real subject of salvation.⁸⁷ For Cavanaugh, 'the effect of sin is the very creation of individuals as such, that is, the creation of an ontological distinction between individual and group.'⁸⁸ As evidence for this view, Cavanaugh draws on Henri de Lubac's interpretation of the Fathers:

Instead of trying, as we do almost entirely nowadays, to find within each individual nature what is the hidden blemish and, so to speak, of looking for the mechanical source of the trouble . . . these Fathers preferred to envisage the very constitution of the individuals considered as so many cores of natural opposition.⁸⁹

While Cavanaugh then moves on to comment on this passage, it is notable that in the very next (unquoted) sentence, Henri de Lubac wrote: 'To be sure, these two explanations are by no means contradictory, and may often in fact be found together.'⁹⁰ Henri de Lubac, therefore, reminds us that sin affects the unity of the personal will with that of God, and the unity of humanity with each other in God.⁹¹ This alerts us to the fact that in Cavanaugh's stress on redemption as reunification, he is addressing the disunity *caused* by sin, not sin itself.

Despite his suspicion of the category of the individual, Cavanaugh cannot help but use it in explaining how individuals are saved: 'The salvation of individuals is only through Christ's salvation of the whole of humanity.'⁹² This can only mean that individuals are outside the Body of Christ, and once incorporated into the Body of Christ, they lose their individuality and become reunited with humanity. As he writes of the Body of Christ, in which the many become one (1 Corinthians 12:4–31): 'the members of the Body are not simply members individually of Christ the Head, but cohere to each other as in a natural body.'⁹³ Is Cavanaugh here guilty of explaining one metaphor through another one? Church members do not literally adhere to one another as parts of a human body. Christians retain their own physicality and mind and spirit, however much their actions, thoughts, and will conform to Christ.

Elsewhere, Cavanaugh writes that sin is the breaking of communion with the church, which, in notorious cases, is recognized formally in the excommunication of the sinner. In excommunication, official recognition is merely given to the breaking of communion that the sinner has already effected.⁹⁴ Cavanaugh cites 1 John 2:18–19,

87. William T. Cavanaugh, "Church," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 394.

88. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 13.

89. Cited in *ibid.*, 12–13. The original passage appears in Lubac, *Catholicism*, 34–35.

90. *Ibid.*, 35.

91. On this point Lubac reminds us of the 'wonderful psychological analyses' of Augustine's *Confessions*. *Ibid.*, 35.

92. See Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 13.

93. See *ibid.*, 13.

94. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 242–243.

where the ‘many antichrists’ are those who ‘went out from us’ and in so doing ‘they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.’⁹⁵

Having outlined and criticized the political theologies of redemption of Milbank and Cavanaugh above, this section will offer some observations of their similarities and differences.

Milbank and Cavanaugh Compared

Both Milbank and Cavanaugh base their anti-statist political salvation on the demonization of the state. The soteriologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh have in common a strong emphasis on the real personality of associations and the church. This position is problematic for the reasons set out below, which, in summary, are that it reinforces the sovereignty of the state and cipherizes the individual.⁹⁶

First, the state. In asserting the personality of associations, pluralists make an argument that can also be used for asserting the personality of the state. The state, as just another association, can be recognized as having legal personality. Mark Neocleous points out that the pluralists sometimes accepted this implication of their ideas themselves. For instance, the English jurist F. W. Maitland wrote that ‘an uncomfortable suspicion that the State itself is but a questionably real person may not be easily dispelled.’⁹⁷ The recognition of the state’s real personality can have the opposite effect to that desired by promoters of the pluralist doctrine. For instance, the state’s personality was recognized by Italian tyrant Mussolini who put the doctrine of *communitas communitatum* into practice to devastating effect.⁹⁸ Others deny the personality of groups altogether, with some nominalists claiming that theirs is the right position based in medieval doctrine and tradition.⁹⁹

Second, the notion of political redemption through associations leaves the individual in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they have to arbitrate between competing associations; on the other hand, if this decision is out of their hands, their autonomy is reduced. With respect to the individual, we also see how corporatism diminishes individual responsibility. For Laski, the danger is that, in personifying an association, ‘we obscure individual responsibility’, becoming loyal to a fictitious

95. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 242.

96. This line of critique is owed to Mark Neocleous, *Imagining the State* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 92–97.

97. F. W. Maitland, “Moral Personality and Legal Personality,” in *State, Trust and Corporation*, ed. David Runciman and Magnus Ryan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67.

98. See Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*, 217–218; Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, 96–97.

99. Ewart Lewis, “Organic Tendencies in Medieval Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review* 32, no. 5 (October 1938): 849–876; Maurice de Wulf, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages*, Louis Clark Vanuxem Foundation Lectures 1920 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922), 220–241. For more recent works that question Otto Gierke see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 59–61.

creation which works to occlude the critical judgment needed to exercise 'reasoned judgment.' Furthermore, he continues:

we give our consciences into the keeping of some national government, some church, or some other association and that their operation is then organized from without until we fail to realise that we have become nothing more than an automatic instrument in the hands of men into the validity of whose power it never occurs to us to enquire.¹⁰⁰

This is also seen in the immunity from prosecution that legal corporations provide to their employees in cases of negligence, even in cases that lead to mass deaths.¹⁰¹ With the state too, which participates in this legal personality, individual responsibility is often difficult to pinpoint.¹⁰² This disappearance of individual responsibility in associations is analogous to the vanishing of the Christian doctrine of sin, as we find here, for example, in Milbank and Cavanaugh. While they do acknowledge evil acts, these are located in an abstract realist understanding of the state, divorced from the sins of responsible individuals who make up the state. The solution here is not to endorse a nominalist doctrine of the state, but merely to recognize that giving the state a 'personality' and will does not remove the taint of political sin from individuals in the state.

It is not surprising that the downplaying of individual sin from the theologies of Milbank and Cavanaugh is reflected in their notions of salvation. As described above, their doctrines of salvation emphasize the reconciliation of humanity to God, and to each other in the politics of the church. A truth of this approach to understanding salvation is that we are in fact redeemed by Christ out of false servanthship to secular or pagan powers. To serve God faithfully means to be released from bondage to a foreign power, as witnessed in the drawn-out battle between Moses and Pharaoh, whereby worship and service of God demanded the non-service of Egypt (Exodus 10:3). Other aspects of their notions of redemption are more questionable.

One issue is that in both Milbank and Cavanaugh the eschatological nature of redemption is underplayed. What purpose does the *parousia* have in our redemption? If Jesus is amongst us as the Body of Christ, then what happens to the expectation of His return? Another aspect of God's eschatological promise is the reconciliation of all creatures to the Creator (Colossians 1:20). This cosmic redemption is missing in the sacramentally-centred salvation of Milbank and Cavanaugh.

As similar as they are in many respects, John Milbank and William Cavanaugh differ on redemption and the state: on the question of the means of political redemption, Milbank is more willing to use the state to bring about a socialist society,

100. Harold J. Laski, "Morris Cohen's Approach to Legal Philosophy," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 15, no. 3 (April 1948): 581–582.

101. For several examples see Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, 84–85.

102. Witness the trial of Adolf Eichmann recounted in Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006).

while Cavanaugh is more of an anarchist. Cavanaugh is more of an anarchist for his proposals that the state is to be rejected altogether. Writing of the classical Russian anarchist Bakunin, Engels writes the following passage which applies equally to the anti-statist politics of Cavanaugh: 'Now then, inasmuch as to Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can keep the state—that is, any state, whether it be a republic, a monarchy or anything else—alive. Hence *complete abstention from all politics*. To commit a political act, especially to take part in an election, would be a betrayal of principle.'¹⁰³ Cavanaugh's politics are anti-statist, but they do have a positive aspect. This, as already shown, is the development of the alternative politics of the church and its action in the development of community-based alternative economies.

Cavanaugh also differs from Milbank on the question of the associations in civil society. Being more of an anarchist than Milbank, it is not surprising that Cavanaugh's main objection to pluralism is the rôle that it retains for the state. Cavanaugh also thinks it a fantasy that the state will divest itself of power.¹⁰⁴ Here we can note some differences between Milbank and Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh wishes to make the church political, but in a different way from Milbank. While Cavanaugh shares with Milbank a concern with the flattening and simplification of social space in modernity,¹⁰⁵ a difference between them is the rôle given to intermediate associations in saving people from this. For Milbank, redemptive value is found in intermediate associations, while Cavanaugh – in claiming that the state *creates* civil society – is sceptical that it can offer an alternative to the state. Milbank is happy to have the church within the same social space as guilds and associations, but Cavanaugh wishes to distinguish the church from other non-state organisations.

Despite their differences, there are great similarities in Milbank and Cavanaugh concerning the status of the individual in redemption. In both Milbank and Cavanaugh the individual is saved from being an individual by being drawn out of the profane state, and into the body of the church. This raises questions about the status of the person in both of their theologies.

The Politics of Redemption in Christian Tradition

Milbank and Cavanaugh are not the only theologians who have soteriology closely related to their assessment of the state. Some have a much more positive assessment of the relationship between the state and redemption, including Barth. This section

103. Friedrich Engels, "Letter, Engels to T. Cuno, January 24, 1872," in *Selected Correspondence*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), 335. Engels's italics.

104. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 194–195.

105. William T. Cavanaugh, "The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization," *Modern Theology* 15, no. 2 (1999): 182–183.

judges whether these positions need to be rejected as positions that make the state sacred by having a redemptive function.

The Nature of Redemption

Discussions of Christian salvation often focus on the means of redemption rather than the ends, yet it is difficult to separate the two. While Jesus is typically affirmed in theology as our only saviour, it is not always emphasized that he saves in many different ways. In writing of Jesus in Acts 4:12, Luke states: 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.' In Matthew 24:23–28 we are warned of 'false messiahs and false prophets'. While affirming an exclusivity of salvific faculty in Jesus Christ, salvation in Christian soteriology is multifaceted, being neither simply individual nor social. Salvation takes place in many different contexts, as Gert J. Steyn shows: *Economically*: Luke 1:52, 1:54, 1:68–75, 2:30–31, 2:38, 3:6, 9:54–56, Acts 1:6–8; *Socially*: Luke 19:9–10; *Physically*: Luke 6:9, 8:48, 8:50, 17:19, 18:42; *Psychologically*: Luke 8:36, 4:18, Acts 10:38; *Religiously*: Luke 1:77, 7:50. Steyn comments that, 'It is a total restoration on all levels of society. It is an holistic approach that provides an opportunity to enter into the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28, 18:26).'¹⁰⁶

To this catalogue, 'politically' can be added. Part of our salvation is political, with God as our sole political redeemer. In Psalm 74:12 God's Kingship is linked with his salvation: 'Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth.' Elsewhere in the Psalter we read:

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
The LORD helps them and rescues them;
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him. (Psalm 37:39–40)

Despite this holistic vision, we should not expect everything in redemption, or from redeemers. Bonhoeffer warns us that redemption is not the solving of human problems:

Since Jesus brings the redemption of human beings, rather than the solutions to problems, he indeed brings the solution to all human problems —“all these things will be given”—though from a completely different vantage point.¹⁰⁷

Human problem-solving is the fruit of redemption, rather than its *raison d'être*. Our political, social, and individual problems are not to be offered up to God for resolution

106. Gert J. Steyn, "Soteriological Perspectives in Luke's Gospel," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 95.

107. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 354. The scriptural reference is Matthew 6:33.

without there being a recognition of what true redemption is, and that only Christ can be the means by which we are redeemed.

Rather than solving human problems, redemption is more to do with the renewal or rebirth of the human. Ephesians 4:22–24 teaches: ‘You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.’ Here, the new self is a return to the untarnished likeness of God that we see in Creation. Understood in this way, redemption to one’s former state requires an appreciation of this former state. In Christianity, this renewal transcends the individual/social divisions common in redemptive language. We are made new through our baptism into Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4), while a ‘new humanity’ is created out of internal, religious, and social divisions (Ephesians 2:15).¹⁰⁸

Christianity teaches both the cleansing of the individual through baptism and their incorporation into the church. In this way, the sacraments affirm that both individual and communal exist in Christian thought and practice. Over-emphasis of one or the other leads to a disappearance of the individual altogether, or, alternatively, an individualistic focus on one’s own piety and destination after death. The metaphors used to describe redemption must take care not to obscure this, as the following section discusses.

Political Redemption

Redemption is personal, but also social and political. As Paul put it, the whole of creation calls for redemption (Romans 8:19–23). While this is a central motif for eco-theology, it is equally important in political theology, being a link between inter-personal relations and the relations between humanity and the remainder of creation.¹⁰⁹ We can better appreciate the political purchase of redemption through some of the social metaphors used to describe the redeemed. These include the ‘Body of Christ’, the ‘People of God’, and the ‘Family of God’. These are not merely ways of understanding the church *per se*; they are how we understand the results of redemption. Milbank and Cavanaugh value the ‘Body of Christ’, because salvation with this metaphor is the incorporation of individuals into the political body of the church. But, as valuable as this metaphor is in ecclesiology, there are other ways of thinking about the social understanding of the church.

There are many metaphors for the church.¹¹⁰ The familial metaphors ‘Family of God’ or ‘children of God’ (see 1 John 3:1–2) are two ways the church is understood. Since the primary community we are born into is the family, to be born again as a

108. See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 218–219.

109. A political and social reading of this passage is given by Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 44–45.

110. Surveys of these include Minear, *Images of the Church* and Dulles, *Models of the Church*.

Christian is to be born into a new family. This being born again happens with our baptism, where we die to the old self and become a new person with a new family: the church. Much of the familial language of the New Testament attests to this, with God as our new Father, and fellow Christians as our brothers and sisters (for example, Mark 3:34–35). The Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963) affirms this move from the individual becoming saved and incorporated into a society: ‘Those who repent and believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord receive the gift of righteousness, are born again, and are adopted into the family of God’ (Art. 6). This is supported scripturally. Pieter G. R. de Villiers, in his study of the first epistle to the Thessalonians, describes new believers as ‘having been saved into a new community similar to that of a family,’¹¹¹ and the church as ‘the new family of God’.¹¹² Later he writes, ‘To be established as a new family, as brothers, is a direct consequence of salvation and is, at the same time, an experience of salvation.’¹¹³ Not only are there familial terms of address used (1 Thessalonians 1:4), but this family supports each other in practice (1 Thessalonians 5:11).¹¹⁴ Milbank also recognizes the political implications of thinking about the church as a family when writing that since the church forms with Israel a ‘spiritual bloodgroup’, we must learn to ‘think of all of our human relations in terms of extended family.’¹¹⁵ He writes this in explaining his notion of the ‘gospel of affinity’ in which the culture of family relations infuse our society with love, penance, forgiveness, and justice.¹¹⁶

While this familial language is not so obviously political to the modern mind as ‘the Body of Christ’, this is not an apolitical usage, since family relations have provided political models in the history of philosophy. In Plato’s *Republic*, the family features as a means to ensure peace and obedience in the *polis*, by using familial names for addressing others. Plato hopes that in calling each other brothers, citizens will treat each other like brothers.¹¹⁷ It is important to note that Plato does not abolish the family, but uses the existing family as the basis for knowing how to act politically. The same might be said of the church: when we refer to fellow Christians as ‘brothers and sisters’, we depend on these relations within the organic family to know how to treat one another socially and politically. When we call God ‘Father’ and Jesus ‘Son’, we become siblings of the Son, which is a way of recognising Jesus’ shared humanity with us, and our shared childship of the Father with the Son. Another way in which this metaphor is political is in the prioritization of the new family over one’s original

111. Pieter G. R. de Villiers, “Safe in the Family of God: Soteriological Perspectives in 1 Thessalonians,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 324.

112. *Ibid.*, 314.

113. *Ibid.*, 326.

114. *Ibid.*, 326.

115. Milbank, “Culture: The gospel of affinity,” 209.

116. *Ibid.*, 209.

117. Plato, *Republic*, §463c–d.

biological family (Luke 9:59–62).¹¹⁸ This is political in the way we belong, along with an extended family, to a household. So the adoption of a new family is the adoption of the new politics of a new household, in this case the household of God (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15). As Bonhoeffer reminds us, this household extends beyond the church for the good of all (Galatians 6:10), and in service of the victims of a “lawless state”.¹¹⁹

It is not intended that this discussion result in displacing the ‘Body of Christ’ as a metaphor for church or should be taken as a way of understanding the politics of the church. It is drawn out here to show that there are other sound models of church, some without offering obvious competitiveness to the state as the body politic. It may be that Christians understand that Christian identity is not only in political opposition to other political bodies. In other words, Christians are not to make the political of great importance, either in what they affirm, or what they deny. That is to say, how we understand the language and metaphors of redemption, and what we are redeemed from and into, makes a huge political difference. As seen in the case of Cavanaugh, his favouring the Body of Christ metaphor for the church allows him to use the Augustinian conflict between the two cities as a parallel for the conflict between the body politic (state) and the Body of Christ (church). Considering the ‘family of God’ image for the church here has shown that while other imagery for the church is not apolitical, the selection of one metaphor over another may reveal – as it does in the case of Cavanaugh – a particular politicizing tendency for finding inherent antagonism between the church and state.

The notion of political redemption is one readily seen in Scripture. Following on from considering the state as an order of creation and an order of preservation, the state as an order of redemption or reconciliation will be considered. Here, this is represented through the work of Karl Barth.

Barth and the Order of Redemption

While Barth’s earlier writings on politics had anarchist (or libertarian socialist) tendencies toward the state,¹²⁰ in his mature theology, Barth was a proponent of the idea of the state as an order of redemption.¹²¹ As already seen, he rejected the state as being part of the order of creation, as this risked getting too close to natural

118. See Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 300–301. Also see Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 133.

119. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” in *Berlin, 1932–1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 365.

120. See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, “Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth,” in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. and trans. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 55–56.

121. Karl Barth, “From the Discussion in Budapest on the Morning of April 1st 1948,” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946–52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. Stanley Godman (London: SCM Press, 1954), 94. Barth also calls it ‘the order of divine salvation and grace’ in Barth, “Christian Community,” 170.

theology. So, while he earlier saw a need to fight the state, in later writing he seems to have moved to an acceptance of the state, but not its metaphysical justification. His commentary on Romans 13 explicitly denies both 'Revolution' and 'Legitimism'.¹²² He sees, for instance, how the state can work for the will of God as 'an order of grace relating to sin.'¹²³ For Barth, the state is God's instrument of grace in a sinful world, not a mere human tool for a better world. In apparent indifference to human systems of government, Barth denies all attempts to make the Kingdom of God through human structures, including the church. This section shows that, even though Barth called the state an order of redemption, he does not sacralize it.

Barth's order of redemption comes close to being preservative. The civil community, 'is the sign that mankind . . . is yet not forsaken but preserved and sustained by God. It serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time: time for preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith.'¹²⁴ This sense of time is the time of waiting for Christ's return. Naturally, it follows that if the state is playing a part in redemption, it has to be preserved against threats to its existence. This does not make the means of preservation redemptive, but these means have to be accepted as part of God's overall salvific programme. This causes a few problems for Barth in his relationship to war, and the use of the state's police function. Barth is no pacifist; he considered pacifism an absolutism, arguing that Christians ought to obey God and not some principle or idea.¹²⁵ Rather, Barth accepts the necessity of force, but would not grant that force and violence constitute the essence of the state:

But it does this in any case, and it is no primary concern of Christian ethics to say that it should do so, or to maintain that the exercise of power constitutes the essence of the state, i.e., its *opus proprium*, or even a part of it. What Christian ethics must insist is that it is an *opus alienum* for the state to have to exercise power.¹²⁶

It is interesting that there is a parallel passage to this in Weber, who wrote: 'Violence is, of course, not the normal or the only means available to the state.'¹²⁷ For this reason, it is astonishing that Cavanaugh agrees with Barth here,¹²⁸ since, for Cavanaugh, the state is born and sustained by violence, and therefore one would expect him to offer the opposite view to Barth.¹²⁹ According to O'Donovan, Paul

122. Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 477.

123. Barth, *Ethics*, 518.

124. Barth, "Christian Community," 156.

125. Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey, *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* 10 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 81.

126. Barth, *CD III/4*, §55, 456.

127. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 33.

128. Cavanaugh, "From One City to Two," 315.

129. Cavanaugh affirmatively cites Randolph Bourne's adage that, 'War is the health of the State' in "From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space," *Political Theology* 7, no. 3 (2006): 307.

Ramsey also disagreed with Barth, believing that force is both always suspect and always necessary.¹³⁰

Barth had a christological understanding of the state, with church and state issues meeting most clearly in the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate.¹³¹ Barth uses this example to show that God's will for the state is much greater than the will of rulers can ever be. He affirms that 'even an evil State cannot escape doing God's will, that is, something good,' so that Pilate 'cannot but serve the will of God.'¹³² This preserves God's absolute freedom in relation to human authorities, in ways that some judgments about the state will not permit. Based on this, Barth does not seem to allow for the state to have its own will, apart from that of individuals: 'The State as such is neutral, but the men who make up the State are not neutral.'¹³³ This is also seen in the fall of sinners, but the state – as an order of God – cannot fall.¹³⁴ Given this distinction, Barth allows for the removal of rulers, but not the overthrow of the system of government itself.¹³⁵ He comments that, 'The State is always both good and evil—just like the Church, for that matter.'¹³⁶

But in response to a question about the Christian attitude to a godless state that becomes an enemy of the church, Barth's answer gives pause for thought: 'I am afraid that these questions betray the uneasiness of a mistrust that is not Christian.'¹³⁷ Barth continues that, 'There is not a trace in the New Testament of the Church being afraid of the State.'¹³⁸ Instead of fear of the state, Barth urges trust in the God who has everything in his hands. This explains why, in his *Ethics*, Barth places his main discussion of the state under the section titled 'Humility'.¹³⁹

Barth opposes an Augustinian understanding of the state as the city of devils.¹⁴⁰ Nor is the state the Antichrist. Barth sees violence as a secondary purpose for the state, because his primary rôles of the state include a broadly socialist agenda that includes the defence of 'equal rights', the provision and protection of 'national labor', education and culture, freedom of action and expression, and public support for the church.¹⁴¹ In short, Barth promotes the state as a means of service to one's neighbour.¹⁴² Barth's

130. Oliver O'Donovan, "Karl Barth and Paul Ramsey's "Uses of Power"," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, by Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 270.

131. Barth, *Table Talk*, 71; Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, 108.

132. Barth, *Table Talk*, 71.

133. *Ibid.*, 73.

134. *Ibid.*, 74.

135. *Ibid.*, 77, 79.

136. *Ibid.*, 77, 79.

137. The question and answer appear at Barth, "From the Discussion in Budapest," 97–98.

138. *Ibid.*, 99.

139. Barth, *Ethics*, § 13, 445–451.

140. *Ibid.*, 445. Barth here comments on Augustine, *City of God*, XI, 34; XIV, 28; XV, 1.17; XXI, 1.

141. Barth, *Ethics*, 519–520, 448.

142. *Ibid.*, 521, 445.

justification of the state is partly based on the mutual service for one another that the state enables.¹⁴³ He wrote:

The church recognizes and helps the state inasmuch as service to the neighbor, which is the purpose of the state, is necessarily included in its own message of reconciliation and is thus its own concern. It will take up a reserved attitude toward the state to the extent that this diverges from its purpose, being unable as the church to accept co-responsibility in this regard.¹⁴⁴

This approach to the state is probably the most popular one in liberal societies, where the church maintains a watching brief on the actions of the state and speaks 'truth to power', with the aim of keeping the state working on behalf of us for the care of the neighbour. This favourable evaluation of the state does not see the state as part of the Kingdom of God, of which it knows nothing.¹⁴⁵

Good Works and the Welfare State

The argument that the state can be a redemptive power seldom takes such theologically rigorous forms as found in Barth. To some Christians, the state's salvific rôle in society is found in positive evaluations of its regulatory and distributive functions. Such a state is not divorced from Christian concerns; in these ways the state becomes the vehicle for the liberation of individuals and communities out of sin, poverty, or illness. Such a view rejects a sole focus on the destiny of the person in the after-life and endorses a view of salvation which includes this life as a foretaste of the next.

In its negative form, this view of the state takes shape in efforts to curtail sin, often through the regulation of 'sinful' activity, such as trade in alcohol, weapons, and pornography. A notorious example of such morals legislation was 'The Noble Experiment' of alcohol prohibition in the USA from 1920 to 1933. In this way, the state, according to some theological views, becomes part of the restraint of evil, making sinning more difficult, and salvation more likely.

A more positive rôle for the state can be found in a theology of good works, which may also support a theology of the state as redeemer. If good works are good, then the more the better. And what better vehicle to leverage good intentions than the state, which has considerable powers at its disposal? This finds expression in Christian support for the welfare state.

The miserable social conditions of the late nineteenth century and the Great Depression provided impetus for the current welfare state. In *Rerum Novarum* (§3), Leo XIII wrote 'some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and

143. Barth, *Ethics*, 518.

144. *Ibid.*, 450.

145. Barth, "Christian Community," 167.

wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class'. Leo XIII lamented the loss of some possible remedies, such as guilds, because a living wage was not being generated through the labour market. Remedies had to be sought elsewhere, and were found in the welfare state. Other associations did not always collapse or disappear; some were absorbed into the state, including many church organisations. Sunday Schools led to state education, while state healthcare came from Christian hospitals, and welfare and social provision from Christian charity. A basic social safety net, education and health became the *sine qua non* of state functions, providing the state with unprecedented legitimacy.¹⁴⁶ In Britain in the mid-twentieth century, Christian leaders championed the rise of welfarism, with Donald Soper, President of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, declaring, 'I thank God for the welfare state.'¹⁴⁷ Views in support of welfare were consolidated in the West so that this opinion of Haddon Willmer became standard fare: 'the state as systematic and extended love of neighbours is a form of the Good Samaritan. In the state, the Good Samaritan may be given a longer reach'.¹⁴⁸ While the welfare state has resources to address social ills well beyond that of the church, it remains a subject of debate whether private charity in total could meet the needs of the poor.

The rise of the welfare state has been heavily criticized in church circles. One criticism that Milbank and Cavanaugh would endorse is that the welfare state makes relations between human beings abstract and bureaucratic.¹⁴⁹ The massive scope of modern states helps to explain the increasingly abstract and bureaucratic nature of modern political life. Such concerns were held by British Catholics, who initially held staunch opposition to the rise of the welfare state, but eventually this died away.¹⁵⁰ Catholic opposition to the excesses of the welfare state was seen more recently in Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*:

In recent years the range of such intervention has vastly expanded, to the point of creating a new type of State, the so-called "Welfare State". This has happened in some countries in order to respond better to many needs and demands, by remedying forms of poverty and deprivation unworthy of the human person. However, excesses and abuses, especially in recent years, have provoked very harsh criticisms of the Welfare State, dubbed the "Social Assistance State" . . . By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for

146. Michael Walzer, "Dissatisfaction in the Welfare State," in *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 27.

147. Quoted in Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920–1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 422.

148. Haddon Willmer, "Towards a Theology of the State," in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, ed. David F. Wright (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981), 95.

149. See Cavanaugh, "Separation and Wholeness," 27–28.

150. See Coman, *Catholics and the Welfare State*, 41–68; 86–107.

serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending.¹⁵¹

It is here we have a paradox for the church. The state's increased intrusion into the various institutions of social life, lamented in Christian social thought since the late nineteenth century, found encouragement elsewhere in the church. The church supported, and continues to support, state action on behalf of the vulnerable and the state's regulation of human life to endorse Christian morality, while at the same time lamenting the growing scope of state action. Welcomed by some in the church as the necessary work of the state, justified on the basis on extending God's justice and peace, others see this extension of state action as the risking the sacralization of the welfare state. Norwegian bishop Eivind Berggrav, for example, gave the following warning of the state's idolatrous desire for growth and praise:

This state wishes to become, as we have seen, a kind of "All-Father," it wants to be omnipotent. There will be no actual demands to worship the state, in the traditional sense; rather, it will be said that the state is sufficient; that the state is all we need; that we need no Providence beyond the STATE. The state which we see developing today, attempts to take the place of God by substituting welfare for God and Faith.¹⁵²

In summary, we can see that the church has supported the state in regulating morality and providing welfare, often with the effect of displacing the redemptive functions of the church in making Christians virtuous and willing helpers of the poor. This is not to make works more important than faith, but in giving over to the state the functions of works, our faith can be diminished. But only if it is not relocated to faith in the state. The church's politics must, therefore, be extremely wary of sacralizing the state as an agent of welfare.

The Redeeming State?

This chapter has been focussed on redemption in church and state. It affirms that we cannot work for our own redemption, even if human work is required in the political sphere in enacting our love of our neighbour. Duane Friesen emphasizes that redemption is a gift and does not come through human effort, and within this grace political work is relativized:

151. Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," Vatican, May 1, 1991, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html> (accessed April 23, 2013), § 48.

152. Eivind Berggrav, "State and Church Today: The Lutheran View," in *The Proceedings of the Second Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation, Hannover, Germany July 25 – August 3, 1952*, ed. Carl E. Lund-Quist (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1952), 83.

This redemption is celebrated as God's gift. It does not come about primarily by human effort, nor does it arise out of the inherent goodness of humanity. This makes the biblical concept of the redemption of human institutional life very different from various forms of secular humanism which have neither a view of human sin nor consequently a concept of grace. It is in the context of this gracious activity of God that human ethical responsibility for human institutional transformation should be understood.¹⁵³

Yet, at times, the redemption offered by the state may seem more within humanity's grasp than waiting for it as God's gift. In this way, we relate to the situation of the near-defeated Israelites in Isaiah 36 who are mockingly taunted by the Rabshakeh, who say to them: 'Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, The LORD will save us. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?' (Isaiah 36:18). To the believer in political and military might, these means of the state can appear irresistible and necessary. But it is a mistake, as the Assyrians were to find out, that the God of Israel is like any god or idol. False gods may be impotent in the wake of military might, but, ultimately, God delivers the Israelites from the hands of the Assyrians. Faith demands no surrender to the state, nor seeking of redemption other than in Christ.

This chapter has shown the ambiguous nature of considering the state as a redeemer. Political redemption is obscure for several reasons. First, the nature of the human condition, from which we need to be redeemed, remains indistinct until we arrive in a new redeemed situation and can look back on where we once were. Christianity teaches the sinfulness of the human being and how we are redeemed out of sin and death by Jesus Christ. That much is agreed, yet theologians disagree over the nature of sin and what redemption is and how it occurs.

Second, as this chapter has discussed, there is a conflict between those who see the state as sacred (either as an autonomous redeemer, or by being God's direct tool for our redemption), and those who view the state as an profanely standing in the way of our redemption. The first group includes secular people who wish to liberate humanity through the state, or Christian people who wish to supplement God's redemptive work by baptising the state's secular reforms. The second group believes that our personal and corporate salvation requires eliminating or minimizing the profane state by actively undermining it or working outside of it. Christians have been attracted to this view too. At the same time, the church teaches that only God can save us. From a Reformed perspective, *sola fide* teaches that only faith can save and perfect us. The state is not our redeemer and can add nothing to the work of Christ. The position

153. Duane K. Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1986), 71.

argued for here is that the state is neither a redeemer nor a barrier to the redemption we have in Christ.

For Milbank and Cavanaugh, redemption is social and saves us from individuality into the political body of the church and, in the case of Milbank, other social bodies. Yet, there are shortcomings with this. This anthropology accepts our inherent social nature and the desire for communion with others, which is the same nature lying at the basis of natural law theories of the state. But Milbank's and Cavanaugh's crude adoption of the notion of the personality of groups raises many questions. It is not clear, for example, that the myriad groups that Milbank wishes to see occupying a more complex space have their own internal absolute sovereignty. If they are not absolute in their own space, then it might be asked who is sovereign over them; it must either be the individual, the state or the church. If these groups have sovereignty there is potential that they may in fact be more oppressive than the state¹⁵⁴, replacing one sovereign (the state) with several. As Morris Cohen writes: 'The evils of an absolute state are not cured by the multiplication of absolutes.'¹⁵⁵ Since Milbank and Cavanaugh link their ecclesiology to group personality, it may be asked whether a political and legal doctrine can legitimately form the basis of the doctrine of the church (the biblical notion of the Body of Christ seemed secondary to this).

Conclusions

In Milbank and Cavanaugh we have two different forms of political redemption. For Milbank, redemption is out of the secular state and into a complex space made up of numerous overlapping associations. For Cavanaugh, it is through the Eucharist in the church that offers redemption by reunifying humanity as one. In their detail these approaches reveal real differences between Milbank and Cavanaugh. Milbank is willing to make use of the state in bringing about his desired form of society, while for Cavanaugh, who is more of an anarchist, the state offers just a parody of the true redemption.

The church, in engaging with the state, can easily be tempted to see the state as sacred and as a redemptive force in society. Or it may see the state as profane in standing in the way of our redemption. Milbank and Cavanaugh take this latter approach; many other theologians take the former. To avoid either of these positions requires putting the state in its place, being sceptical about the claims of politics, and having a theologically-rich anthropology and sound doctrine of sin. These things will help prevent the church seeing the state as a redeemer. As the next chapter argues, the church may be involved in statecraft, but should not do so when it makes the state a sacred redeemer.

154. Morris R. Cohen, "Communal Ghosts and Other Perils in Social Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 16, no. 25 (December 1919): 687.

155. *Ibid.*, 689.

This chapter concludes the threefold treatment of looking at the state as a creator, preserver, and redeemer, and the assessment of Milbank and Cavanaugh in light of this framework. Each of the last three chapters took a similar approach in considering how the great works of God in creation, preservation, and redemption relate to the state. This framework was then used to assess the soundness of the contribution of Milbank and Cavanaugh to understanding the state theologically. The next chapter draws on the conclusion drawn so far, that the state is mundane, and proposes that given this assessment of the state, occasional statecraft is permissible for the church.

Chapter 6

The Political Church and Desacralized Statecraft

If the state is as profane as Milbank and Cavanaugh suggest, then surely it is something faithful Christians should avoid, limiting prospects for Christian engagement with the state. The logic at work here is that there is a direct connection between a correct theological understanding of the state and the possibility of Christian engagement with it. Engaging with the profane state in the politics of statecraft would be particularly ruled out, since this would be staining of the Christian, who should not participate, even indirectly, in violence. If the state is properly sacred as a direct and immediate creation and tool of God, then engagement is possible, even a duty in some cases. If, however, the state is a mundane instrument, Christians have nothing to fear in occasionally engaging with it.

The case for the profane state, as the previous three chapters show, rests on its profane origins, how it is preserved by violence, and how it competes with the church as our redeemer. For these reasons, both Milbank and Cavanaugh are negative about the possibilities of positive Christian engagement with the state. The previous chapters on creation, preservation, and redemption have examined their arguments and have argued instead for the deprofanization of the state from these negative assessments, and alongside a desacralization from positions that try to sacralize the state. This task of deprofanizing and desacralizing theologies of the state continue in this chapter in order to provide the basis for occasional Christian statecraft as *a* tool of the public witness of the church, making it a mere tactic, but never a strategy or goal. This chapter further argues that both God and Christians are free to act politically. God's freedom enables God to use political forces, including the state, for God's purposes. Individuals and churches are also free to be 'political' in a range of ways, but it must always remain secondary to faithfulness to God, and the love of one's neighbour.

'Statecraft', the name given here for engagement with the state, is often used to

describe what ‘statesmen’ do, particularly in international affairs.¹ But there are other definitions of the term, some with a strong historic link to Christian political thought, including the genre of ‘mirrors for princes and political testaments’ which aimed to guide and influence rulers.² For John Tashjean, statecraft focuses on the ‘art of leadership, on the key questions of public policy and on the problems of political and military strategy.’³ Much Christian political thought fits within Tashjean’s category of statecraft, including works of Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Erasmus, and many others.⁴ These examples show that statecraft used to describe the way in which rulers first managed themselves and, from that, the affairs of state. Following the French Revolution, increasing democratization diverted attention from the ruler to political structures.⁵ But this was not a direct shift. The rise of the modern state meant that, as more people come to be directly an object of the state’s concern, these people became more interested in how the state could be used to solve social problems. Following this logic, the rise of the state has inevitably meant that politics would come to be defined as statecraft, with politics understood as the domain of the state, which has become the primary force in changing history.

Consonant with more modern usage, the definition of ‘politics as statecraft’ in this chapter follows that of Bell: ‘that social and political power rests in the state and therefore the key to change is seizing the state and wielding it for revolutionary ends.’⁶ Here, Bell adapts Weber’s definition of ‘politics’ as being about ‘the leadership, or the exercise of influence on the leadership, of a *political* organization, in other words a *state*.’⁷ According to Bell, the church has been captivated by the *mythos* of politics as statecraft, and can imagine no other way of being the church in relation to the state than its conscience, offering pointers in the right direction for Christianization of the social order. This is seen whenever Christians run for political office, or try to influence those in power. Since both Milbank and Cavanaugh agree with Bell that the church is a political body in its own right it is no surprise that that also reject politics as statecraft.

The approach this chapter takes is not to see the staining influence of the state come from the state itself, but from the idolatry that elevates the state into the place of God, and imagines that it can create, sustain, and redeem individuals and society. On the other hand, it is a mistake to make the state wholly profane. To do this is to

1. Morton A. Kaplan, “An Introduction to the Strategy of Statecraft,” *World Politics* 4, no. 4 (July 1952): 548.

2. John E. Tashjean, “On Theory of Statecraft,” *The Review of Politics* 35, no. 3 (July 1973): 375.

3. *Ibid.*, 382.

4. See for several examples *ibid.*, 383–384; and, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume One: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 213–215.

5. Tashjean, “On Theory of Statecraft,” 384.

6. Daniel M. Bell Jr., “Only Jesus Saves: Toward a Theopolitical Ontology of Judgment,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 203.

7. Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 32. Weber’s italics. Cited by Bell, “State and Civil Society,” 426. Although it should be noted here that Weber observes a much broader definition and limits the discussion to the state in this instance for the purposes of his lecture.

make the whole secular world profane, without allowing for the freedom of God to use human institutions for his purposes. The error to avoid is to equate the world with worldliness.

Drawing heavily on the thought of Jacques Ellul, this chapter begins with the notion and practice of desacralization and how it puts the state in its place. This clears the way for a closer consideration of statecraft in Milbank and Cavanaugh. Finally, a Christian statecraft is defended as an appropriate and occasional tactic of the church's politics, which manages to avoid making the state profane or sacred, and is part of putting the state in its proper mundane rôle.

A Desacralized State

This section will focus on the desacralization of the state in order to clear the way for the church to engage with the state without fear of contamination. This is necessary because Milbank and Cavanaugh link the profane state with the dangers of statecraft. They believe that the state is tarnished by being based in, and sustained by, illegitimate violence. Furthermore, in their Augustinianism, the state is an expression of the undisciplined desire to dominate others. It has a will to power and has become, in its modern form, beyond the control of citizens. The state, as the City of Man, is opposed to the City of God, the former being profane, the latter being holy and sacred. On their reading, there is no easy reconciliation of these; in fact they are diametrically opposed. Statecraft, for them, is profane for shoring up the state and entrenching the statist imagination. The argument here does *not* directly oppose Milbank and Cavanaugh and suggest that the state is good and that statecraft is a worthy, noble practice of the church. Rather, it values the contribution of Milbank and Cavanaugh in exposing the idolatrous nature of statism. The argument here is that non-statist statecraft is as ambiguous as the state itself. This means that statecraft will be found to be sometimes valuable and sometimes less so. A theological appraisal of the state and statecraft can parallel Milbank's assessment of modernity: 'Not outright refusal, nor outright acceptance.'⁸

Nevertheless, the church's political judgment requires its outright refusal of the demonic, and the outright acceptance of the Divine. The argument here is that the state is neither, but is merely mundane, a position maintained by continually desacralizing and deprofanizing the state from the extremes of the sacred and profane. Previous chapters attempted to desacralize the modern state from any positive religious significance in being seen as creator, preserver, or redeemer. This task is nothing less than the theological deconstruction of the Church's statist political imagination. This task involves the church in shaping its own theological reflection on the social order so that the statist imaginary has a much reduced influence in its own life. In

8. Milbank, "Culture: The gospel of affinity," 196.

preaching and teaching about the true Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, it can reduce the idolatrous temptation to locate these apart from God, whether in the state or elsewhere.

Such idolatry can take the form of misplaced trust or confidence in human rulers that displace God's true rule (Psalm 118:8–9; 146:3–4; Jeremiah 17:5–6). Yet care needs to be taken not to give these verses a strong anarchist interpretation. In commenting on this viewpoint in Psalm 146, James Luther Mays writes that the Psalm 'does not say that leaders are unnecessary or not useful. It does warn against trusting them for salvation.'⁹ We see misplaced ultimate trust in human leaders (a perennial temptation, according to Mays¹⁰) when the state is idolized by being ascribed with salvific powers that properly belong to God. The potential of Christianity to put the state back in its place through its desacralization (without making it profane) is the subject of the next section.

The emphasis here is on desacralization not on deprofanization. Rather than confront the profane state head on and resacralize it, as some would through a shallow appeal to Romans 13 and parallel texts, the approach taken is to desacralize the state by making it mundane, rather than profane.

Practical Desacralization

Jacques Ellul is a modern guide to how to desacralize of the state, which he identifies as a religious idol of modernity. Ellul believes that desacralizing the state is a political rôle of the church. Another is to form its members so that they can resist the ubiquitous propaganda of the state that tries to shape the political imaginations of all its citizens so that they begin to see it as their preserver and redeemer. Such desacralization, being the removal of the mystique of the state, has real benefits for Ellul: 'If we regard the state as a set of offices, with a lot of papers, with typewriters — things — then we are much less ready to sacrifice the lives of human beings to it. Other reasons will be needed at that moment. The state is no longer the last reason.'¹¹ It ought to be noted at this point that Cavanaugh advocates something similar to Ellul here when he writes that, 'The urgent task of the Church, then, is to demystify the nation-state and to treat it like the telephone company.'¹² Cavanaugh's focus here is to avoid the making state the defender of the common good, and to make it become merely a provider of goods and services (like mail delivery).

Cavanaugh does not offer any specifics on how to go about this task of demystification. Ellul, on the other hand, suggests how we might proceed:

9. Mays, *Psalms*, 440.

10. *Ibid.*, 441.

11. Jacques Ellul, "Christian Faith and Social Reality," in *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, ed. and trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 177.

12. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 266.

We must profane by our *conduct*, not by statements or theories, the sacred of money, the sacred of the State (which means that the State and politics are reduced to their function of managing the material interests of a collectivity, an honorable function but not one involving any excessive valuing or sacralizing, all this in accordance with the doctrine of the secularity of the State).¹³

How Ellul suggests we desacralize money provides a model for how we can desacralize the state. On profaning money he writes: 'To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character.'¹⁴ 'Profane' is being used here in a slightly different sense from its main usage in the present work. It is not Ellul's intention to make money polluted or dirty, but rather, following the sense of 'mundane' in this work, 'unhallowed' and lacking in religious significance. Once removed of its sacred character, money can become a mere instrument for exchange, and the grip that money has on us is broken. As a result of this act we can once more become the masters of money, and not its slaves, using it in a way that it does not conflict with our Christian faith.

In a sermon on 1 Timothy 6:7–19, Augustine preached a similar ethics to Ellul, suggesting that we can use money out of necessity, but should not love it. Money, for Augustine, should have mere utility for the journey through this world, but not displace the true object of our desire, which should be God alone.¹⁵ Rather than blame what some might see as defective objects (gold, bodies, praise, power), Augustine blames the defective will for seeking in things that which we should seek in God alone. The classic discussion in Augustine here is the distinction between use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*).¹⁶ In general, Augustine writes that 'the good make use of this world in order to enjoy God.'¹⁷ This use of the world, already extended to money, may also be extended to states; we should not seek from, nor give to states that which God alone can provide, or is owed.¹⁸

Returning to Ellul, he specifically advocates giving money away as a key profaning act, which takes its purest form in the gift.¹⁹ For Ellul, giving is profaning because it directly challenges the ever present temptation to accumulate and hoard wealth, as he finds criticized in scripture (Matthew 6:21; 1 Timothy 6:10).²⁰ For Ellul, the

13. Ellul, *False Presence*, 203–204.

14. Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986), 109.

15. Augustine, "Sermon 177: On the Words of the Apostle, 1 Timothy 6:7–19: We Brought Nothing into this World, and What is More We Cannot Take Anything Out of It, etc.; A Discourse on Avarice." Also see Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher, Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), Q. 30; Augustine, *City of God*, § XI.25.

16. A guide to this discussion can be found in Oliver O'Donovan, "Usus and Fructus in Augustine, 'De doctrina Christiana I,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982): 361–397. Also see Markus, *Saeculum*, 67–68.

17. Augustine, *City of God*, § XV.7.

18. *Ibid.*, § XII.8.

19. Ellul, *Money and Power*, 110.

20. *Ibid.*, 83–84.

most profaning act is giving to the church ('Giving to God is the act of profanation par excellence'), and then freely to the needy in acts of free charity, which 'glorifies God and proclaims grace to other men.'²¹ Charitable giving, and especially giving to programmes of direct welfare to the poor, both desacralizes (profanizes) money and undermines the pretensions of the state to be able to solve the questions of poverty and deprivation. In giving directly to the poor, we say to the state that it has been unable to fulfil its promises of poverty eradication, while at the same time enacting the true religion of James 1:27 ('Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.'). To give freely requires the consecration of our money and ourselves to God. Only in God can the pure gift exist; otherwise we give for our own glory, from a sense of duty, or with a desire to receive something in return, which means the gift is not pure, but remains sacralized by expecting something in return.²²

Can the same be said of the state? Can we desacralize the state in the same way, and in the process remove the grip its *mythos* has on us? Like money, the state cannot be avoided in the modern world, but we can treat it in a desacralized fashion that disarms its pretensions to absolute sovereignty over our lives. Ellul makes day-to-day actions an opportunity for the desacralization of the state:

To profane the state, affirm the liberty of the person and your own liberty in actions — actions in the face of the decisions that can make an idol of the state. It might even mean, under certain conditions, refusing to participate in political life. I do not say always, all the time, but under certain conditions; sometimes to be a good, and true, and loyal citizen might mean refusing to play the game that the state offers us.²³

But there remains the danger that poverty or political non-participation become sources of justification. Yet neither are a sign of the church, or necessary for salvation. Ellul writes that 'as soon as this poverty becomes a factor in human self-justification, it loses all its value.'²⁴ Likewise with political power and influence. The church should exhibit its belief that politics is a matter of mere indifference to salvation. It should not affect the church if God permits the dispossession of its political power. The church could even show the world its indifference to power by dispossessing itself or neglecting to use that which it has. Ellul provides an example of this 'Non-Power' (not 'Powerlessness') based on the arrest of Jesus (Matthew 26:47–55).²⁵ The difference, as he suggests, is that Non-Power is voluntarily declining to do something one has the

21. Ellul, *Money and Power*, 111–113.

22. See Stringfellow, *Imposters of God*, 32–33.

23. Ellul, "Christian Faith and Social Reality," 178.

24. Ellul, *Money and Power*, 149.

25. Jacques Ellul, "'I Believe In': Theological Brief," in *Christian Theology: A Case Method Approach*, ed. Robert A. Evans and Thomas D. Parker (London: SPCK, 1977), 38; and also "Lust for Power," trans. The Monks of New Skete, *Katallagete: Be Reconciled* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 30–33.

power to do. As such, Jesus did not call angels to his rescue in Gethsemane in order to demonstrate his power (Matthew 26:53).²⁶

Here, both Ellul and Cavanaugh run into Milbank's criticism of the iconoclast. Milbank writes that 'humans *cannot* escape from fetishisms because we always give material content to signs and we always see material things as signifying.'²⁷ Milbank finds in desacralization the source of many problems of modernity: 'One buys, sells and exploits without reference to tradition, association, duty or end because things and people are now secular and neutral and so the objects of exploitation.'²⁸ Here Milbank's complaint is in the destruction of traditions which inscribed into culture something sacred, which, once removed, opens up the material into neutral objects of exploitation.

The differences here between Milbank and Cavanaugh are instructive. For Milbank, one must not aim for a false neutrality, requiring the removal of all fetish from objects, as there will *always* be some fetishistic remainder. This is where Cavanaugh errs as he fails to see that he has essentially replaced the state as Christ with the state as an Antichrist. This only mystifies it toward the other extreme. Here, Bruno Latour's analysis is a powerful critique of Cavanaugh's iconoclasm: 'Yet somehow the *fetish gains in strength in the hands of the anti-fetishists*. The more you want it to be nothing, the more action springs back from it.'²⁹ And, 'The only one who is projecting his feelings onto the idol is he, the iconoclast with a hammer, not those who by his gesture should be freed from their shackles.'³⁰ If Milbank is right, then the state will rarely be a mere neutral instrument.³¹ But this does not mean that the task of desacralizing is invalid; the church certainly cannot tolerate the divine totalitarian state that tries to be all things to all people. Nor can it believe the state to be an Antichrist. Desacralization and deprofanization from both these options remains an important ongoing project so long as the creation of idols is a temptation. The state will always claim some transcendent meaning beyond its materiality; it is an ongoing political task of the church to deny the state any easy self-sacralization.³²

Scripture and the State

An important part of the theological task of desacralizing the state is to tease out the relationship between sacralizing political ideologies, scripture, and the state. This is

26. On Jesus's powerlessness see Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Vol. 1*, 616.

27. Milbank, "Real Third Way," 70; drawing on Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Milbank's italics.

28. Milbank, "Real Third Way," 70.

29. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 270.

30. Ibid., 271.

31. O'Donovan writes similarly that 'government' (along with literature and money) is no mere neutral technicality, it is a dangerous power in human life 'upon which idolatry, envy, and hatred easily concentrate.' *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 107.

32. The ongoing task of desacralization is recognized in Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom*, 160.

important because, often, statist political theologians have found support in scripture, while others, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, have all but ignored it. For a mundane theological understanding of the state to prevail, neither a sacred nor a profane reading of the state in scripture must predominate.

A well-known criticism of Radical Orthodox theologians is that they rarely interact with scripture. David Ford, in a review article of the movement's manifesto, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, was genuinely puzzled at the lack of scriptural engagement in that volume:

I find all this very disturbing, because I do not see a good theological future for the movement unless this is urgently addressed. Scripture is so intrinsic to the traditions, practices and theologians they espouse that without it their claim to be in continuity with these is hopelessly compromised. Further, it is unlikely that many of the doubts of critics about matters such as attention to particularities, historical credibility, and serious engagement with other disciplines will be allayed unless they can be shown to be unfounded at least in relation to scripture. There is also the church aspect: a theology that does not inhabit the Bible in lively ways is very unlikely to be more than a set of ideas unable to reach beyond a very limited 'high culture' milieu.³³

Catherine Pickstock, who replied to Ford on behalf of the book's editors, acknowledged their lack of scriptural engagement, and stated that 'all the editors intend that this should be remedied in the future.'³⁴ In a later passage, she strangely placed 'the exposition of scripture' in the middle of a paragraph on 'other disciplines and religions.'³⁵ It is not clear whether scripture is the way into the other disciplines, or whether the study of scripture is a discipline outside theology. Nevertheless, there is little evidence since 2001 that Pickstock's promised remedy has been forthcoming.

While ignoring or side-lining the scriptural commentaries of Augustine and Aquinas, Radical Orthodox writers, including Milbank and Cavanaugh, have mined them for their philosophical utility. The tearing apart of the seamlessness of biblical study and doctrinal and philosophical work in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church is hardly in line with Radical Orthodoxy's wish to overcome dualisms in theology. Radical Orthodox authors have no trouble incorporating a wide range

33. David F. Ford, "Radical Orthodoxy and the Future of British Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (2001): 398. R. R. Reno notes Radical Orthodoxy's 'overall ambivalence about the role of Scripture' in "The Radical Orthodoxy Project," *First Things*, February 2000, <<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/the-radical-orthodoxy-project-42>> (accessed April 23, 2013). Also see C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, "The Word Made Silent: Reflections on Christian Identity and Scripture," in *The Gift of Difference: Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation*, ed. Chris K. Huebner and Tripp York, with a foreword by John Milbank (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 67–86.

34. Catherine Pickstock, "Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (2001): 411.

35. *Ibid.*, 420.

of texts into their work: from the Church Fathers to French post-modernists there is apparently nothing that they cannot tell us about. Why then the reticence over the Bible? Especially since Radical Orthodoxy promised the mingling of 'exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed *collage*.'³⁶ Furthermore, as James H. Olthuis points out, Radical Orthodoxy's language of participation, as just one example, can also be found in scripture.³⁷ One must suspect that another agenda is at work here in the privileging of scripture – not in its use, but in its avoidance.

An important reason for the marginalization of scripture is political, with the rise of the modern state affecting the way we read scripture today. Modern hermeneutics, strongly shaped by the modern exclusion of participation in transcendence, also splits the Bible from politics.³⁸ Drawing on John Milbank's and Jon Levenson's criticism of Spinoza, Daniel Bell has claimed that modern readings of scripture are 'statist', being determined by the modern statist imagination.³⁹ This remark is central to the rejection/demotion of scripture in his political theology, and the dismissal of others who might try to read scripture as a guide to a theology of the state and social action. Bell suggests that the 'theological interpretation of Scripture thereby necessitates a recovery of the political vocation of the church.'⁴⁰ Bell, believing that all readings are political, wishes to recapture from the state a political reading of scripture that is sited within the church as *polis*. In making this move, Bell mirrors modern political hermeneutics, with our material politics largely determining our readings. If one adopts such a materialist view, it is only by changing the church that we can change our readings of scripture. To Bell, politics as statecraft provides a problematic hermeneutic, and one that must be overcome by asserting the church as *polis*; and only when this is achieved can the Bible be read safely. Despite his disavowal of 'foundationalist methodologism', Milbank shares with others within Radical Orthodoxy an ecclesiological foundationalism when it comes to the interpretation of scripture.⁴¹ In their perspective, the church becomes the foundation to the reading of scripture. Scripture cannot teach us anything until it is freed from modernity's grip on the hermeneutical imagination.

36. Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, "Suspending the material," 2. Original italics.

37. James H. Olthuis, "Afterword: A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking "with" Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 285.

38. Milbank hints at the sociological capture of the Bible in Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9–10. Named as the perpetrators of the modern hermeneutics, which split the Bible from politics are Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza.

39. Daniel M. Bell Jr., "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," *Ex Auditu* 22 (Justice 2006): 88; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 19–22; Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies*, 1st ed (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 117.

40. Bell, "Jesus, the Jews," 88.

41. John Milbank, "Ecclesiology: The last of the last," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 109.

By placing the formation or rediscovery of the true church *prior* to the reading of scripture, this approach demonstrates a dangerous ordinal fallacy. This is that until the true church is incarnated we cannot do sound biblical work. This leaves the Bible trapped until liberated by philosophy and an alternative politics. But if the Bible is so trapped, is not God himself also ensnared? Furthermore, how is the church to form, if not through the hearing of the Word? It is no escape from this problem to answer that the church forms through the Eucharist, since the sacrament is established in scripture. Another problem with this view is that scripture plays no rôle, either in the proclamation of faith, or in the demolition of statist *mythos*. But, in a truly theological politics, scripture can work to hinder the adoption of statism and defend the Christian *mythos*. For instance, scripture, read through the tradition of the Reformed confessions, can act as a bulwark against political ideology, as it did in Hungary:

The Confessions constituted the standard and norm by which Bible interpretation was judged. This constraint kept our church from being diverted away from the firm foundation of the Holy Scripture by the different philosophical movements and political ideologies that appeared over the centuries.⁴²

This assessment runs counter to the materialist claims that political ideology inevitably shapes the reception of scripture. So, rather than the Bible being held captive to the *mythos* of modernity, scripture can be used to demythologize theology's enslavement to modern thought. To have it any other way is to subordinate the Word of God to human thought. Ellul, writing in the 1970s, when the demythologization of scripture was a popular idea, suggested that contrary to this movement, scripture was an essential tool in the demythologization of society:

How can we fail to realize that scripture, *in precisely the same way in which the myths contained in scripture itself are treated*, is the true destroyer of myths. How can we fail to see that one need only apply this to politics, to nationalism, to communism, to science, etc., in order to reduce them all to changeable undertakings which are meaningless in themselves?⁴³

In conclusion, scripture not only offers the encouragement and tools to demythologise the state (as one among many idols and 'so-called gods' that humans have created (see 1 Corinthians 8:4–6), but also offers positive encouragement to statecraft as well.⁴⁴

42. Zsolt Gereb, "The Reflection of the Reformed Confessional Character in the Method Applied in Twentieth-Century Transylvanian Hungarian Exegetical Work," in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 117.

43. Ellul, *False Presence*, 206–207. Ellul's italics.

44. On Paul's description of the 'so-called gods', see Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 131–132.

Statecraft in Milbank and Cavanaugh

Within Radical Orthodoxy, it is Daniel Bell who most strongly rejects politics as statecraft. He has two main reasons for this position. First, the state is now no longer able to control the market, since the state is now the servant, and not the master of capitalism.⁴⁵ For Bell, believing that the state can provide justice in ways that may conflict directly with the needs of capital is naïve at best and dangerous at worst. Second, if the church accepts this definition of politics as statecraft, it accepts a distinction between the political realm of the state and the spiritual realm of the church.⁴⁶ It is a denial of the church as having any political meaning intrinsic to itself.

On Bell's definition, statecraft should be rejected by the church. But it is certainly too simplistic to accept his account of statecraft, for, while the church rejects the notion of the state as the only political actor, it cannot dismiss the state from the political stage altogether. There is a dualistic understanding of the church's approach to statecraft here. If the church engages with the state, then, for Bell at least, its understanding of politics is *necessarily* statist, resulting in the privatization of the church. In moving to attend to Milbank's and Cavanaugh's positions on statecraft we find both more nuanced and confused positions.

As will be shown below, Milbank has a slightly more favourable view of statecraft than does Cavanaugh, but both stray towards making the state profane for Christians, based in their theologies of the state and its violence. This section will then open up some lines for developing the possibility of Christian statecraft, based in scripture and tradition, not as a baptism of realpolitik, but as a permissible act which is neither sacred nor profane, but in the realm of the indifferent.

Milbank's Dialectical Relationship to Statecraft

Given Milbank's largely negative assessment of the modern state, what relationship does he think Christians and the church should have to it? To reiterate, Milbank sees the secular as coming from bad theology, and the state as part of the secular that is separated from God and existing on the basis of the ontology of violence. The state is therefore directed to the ends of the government through its will, not to the glory of God. As Milbank experienced in the Thatcher era, the state and its bureaucrats are driven by rational immanent ends that are impervious to love. Nevertheless, Milbank does allow some space for Christian politics to relate to the state.

The basis on which the church speaks to power receives its fullest treatment in Milbank's essay, "Body by Love Possessed."⁴⁷ Written during Thatcher's rule, the essay addresses the criticisms of politicians, journalists, and church-goers who

45. Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 17.

46. See Bell, "State and Civil Society."

47. Milbank, "Body by Love Possessed."

questioned the right and competence of the church to speak out on matters of public policy. Milbank defends their right to speak and affirms their courage not to be cowed by fear of technical expertise when their moral criticisms demand to be heard. But for Milbank, this is not enough; theology must earn and demonstrate its right to speak.

Milbank begins with an analysis of the traditional English Anglican form of ecclesiastical encounter with secular political reality. This, he observes, is a union of empiricism and Platonic ethical abstractions, with this approach reaching its apogee in William Temple.⁴⁸ Consistent with Milbank's analysis in *Theology and Social Theory*, he predicts that when church committees come to apply the will of God to public issues, it will be the diagnoses of the situation that will determine the theological response.⁴⁹ Against this temptation, too often yielded to in ecclesiastical practice, Milbank proposes calling into question the 'terms in which secular analyses are made.'⁵⁰

The basis for this critique is a linguistic one, since Christ is *logos*, the communicated word of God. The connection between the *logos* and economics is obscure here, but Milbank suggests that since we can only speak of God through speaking of other subjects, such as history and economics, the Word of God in relation to these is not known to us until it is spoken. The implications of Milbank's approach means that the church has a *duty to itself* to speak on economic and political matters, since not to do so entails accepting 'a fact/value dualism' and this, in turn, involves theology in accepting a 'whole series of buried affinities between the modern scientific approach to politics and economics and the fideist-nominalist-voluntarist current in theology.'⁵¹ So Milbank endorses the church speaking from the basis of faith, provided it does not legitimate bad theology and the secular. But not too much should be hoped for, as this or that policy gain does little to challenge the status quo:

that while, here and there, more or less love and justice may be encourageable in the state, with genuine local mitigations of certain aspects of coercion, that nevertheless a power-based order continues to be held together demonically. In their cumulative total the mitigations only compose a more subtle order of power whose concealment is a further violence and works more assuredly towards the catastrophe of final non-participation.⁵²

In this passage, Milbank almost completely concedes that the state is demonic, and that love and justice have no place in it. Quite apart from the ontological questions this raises for Milbank's assertion of the Christian *mythos* of love over all of life,

48. Milbank, "Body by Love Possessed," 77.

49. *Ibid.*, 78.

50. *Ibid.*, 81.

51. *Ibid.*, 82.

52. John Milbank, "Critical Study," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 213.

this passage is abstracted from any concrete reality. His remarks also echo the old socialist and anarchist criticisms of reformism – that statecraft of this kind leaves profane power in place, and merely tinkers with a corrupt system.⁵³ Yet reforms (even in a profane state) can be of use to real people. Devalued here are the tangible differences to actual people and concrete situations which his abstract approach fails to incorporate. From this point of view, Nigel Biggar poses this challenge to Milbank:

One of the reasons for the unsatisfactory abstract and unattractively moralistic quality of Radical Orthodox theologians' social criticism lies, I think, in their tendency to reach for social, cultural, or political theory when they want to mediate between theological premises and practical judgments. If, instead, they were to spend more time reflecting on concrete cases — whether presented in the press or in history books or in pastoral experience — then their critical concepts would have to wrestle with awkward particulars and, should they survive, become less self-righteous and more discriminating, accurate, patient, and fair.⁵⁴

While Milbank has an aversion to mere 'facts', Biggar's criticism strikes the right chord, as even in his more situationist moments, Milbank sounds abstract.

At times, Milbank sounds opposed to all politics. He writes that radical politics, in recognizing the futility of 'politics', will not reach for 'sovereign power' but work in a situationist fashion 'against this power by seeking to save what can be saved for every individual in every moment: for example, to ensure that every transaction is as far as possible just and charitable, and as far as possible robs the capitalist of his profits, the bureaucratic state of its domination.'⁵⁵ This sounds more consistent with Milbank's overall negative appraisal of the modern state. It is an approach that sounds almost Anabaptist, and one which finds critics who disapprove of such an apparent withdrawal from explicit public engagement with the state. Hans Boersma, for instance, affirms that justice can be found outside the church, and claims that it is 'immoral to leave the realms of civil government and economics to the nonecclesial society and that it is supercilious to claim that the church is the true polis and the only place in which God's hospitality and justice have any impact at all.'⁵⁶

This theme of Milbank's withdrawal has also brought out a more serious problem of the consistency of Milbank's political theology. Jeffrey Stout ponders whether 'Christians . . . may join hands with others in the struggle for justice' and in so doing places Milbank on the horns of a dilemma. For, 'If Milbank thinks they may, then he is implicitly granting the legitimacy of what I am calling a secularized political sphere,

53. For instance, Niebuhr, *Reflections*, 30.

54. Nigel Biggar, *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 99.

55. John Milbank, "Enclaves, or Where Is the Church?" in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 143.

56. Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 239.

and his conclusions are much less radical than they are made to seem. If he thinks they mustn't, then he has little to offer besides nostalgia, utopian fantasy, and withdrawal into a strongly bounded enclave.⁵⁷

Milbank answers clearly, believing that Christians may cooperate with 'secular co-workers: socialists, communists and anarchists' in working for the City of God, despite their problems in grasping counter-empire, which, for them, is 'a matter of simply unleashing more undifferentiated liberty'.⁵⁸ Milbank finds common ground for engagement in those things which secular people already believe, but which 'aren't completely unchristian' or 'residually Christian', such as forgiveness and reconciliation.⁵⁹ But one may suspect that, if common ground is found in these few things, there must remain some significant differences between Christians and non-Christians. Does this mean that Stout is correct? Does this collective activism by Christians alongside atheists mean that there is a secular space where diverse groups of people and individuals can meet for common causes?

Ellul would claim Milbank's enthusiasm for coalition politics as evidence for his politicization thesis:

It is celebrated as a victory of the spirit when anti-Christian materialists and fervent Christians collaborate, when bourgeois intellectuals and factory workers sit on the same committees, when Fascists and Mohammedans, or Christians and Mohammedans work in fraternal harmony. But it should first be asked, what *is* this powerful cement that permits men to overcome race and class differences and eliminates the most violent metaphysical and religious differences? There is only one: politics.⁶⁰

Ellul questions whether this solidarity comes at too high a cost. Since the things that binds diverse groups together is 'a common enemy—a political enemy—and the accord will be all the closer as the hatred against "the other" becomes more violent.'⁶¹ The paramount example of this in the Twentieth Century would be the International Brigades who fought against the Francoists in Spain in the 1930s. A more ecumenical movement would be the current anti-globalization activist coalitions. Furthermore, both Stout and Ellul would have reason to think that Milbank's celebration of coalition politics poses serious questions to his denial of secular space in which politics can operate.

Moving from politics in general to the state, David M. Craig, a critic of Milbank's reading of Ruskin, writes that Milbank does not follow Ruskin where he should, into the world of regulation and enforcement by law to achieve one's political-economic

57. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 105.

58. Milbank, "Culture: The gospel of affinity," 210.

59. Milbank, Oliver, and Shortt, "Radical Orthodoxy," 121–22.

60. Ellul, *Political Illusion*, 20. Ellul's italics.

61. *Ibid.*, 20.

vision.⁶² Milbank's reply is that he has supported state action.⁶³ 'Like Ruskin,' Milbank writes, 'certainly I do not see state activism as the prime means to bring about a socialist condition.'⁶⁴ In opposition to state programmes, Milbank prefers local trading schemes which relate producers directly to consumers. Yet he believes that such action can only happen within a 'wider institutional framework . . . culminating in the state, which should appropriately have oversight in some areas . . . and a role in others.'⁶⁵ Milbank favours a pastoral rôle for a Christianized state as part of the *ecclesia*. Milbank declares at the end of this section 'I am an Anglican, not an Anabaptist!'⁶⁶ It is clear from this section on Ruskin that Milbank favours a state that directs its power towards the good as understood by the church. This is no liberal state, which is indifferent toward the good, but one which participates in bringing it about.

With regard to public participation in the modern state, Milbank's criticisms of Matthew Arnold's educational vision are highly pertinent. The Arnoldian vision was deficient, according to Milbank, because Arnold assumed that the state could nurture its citizens in human flourishing through political participation. But Milbank found two reasons why this was wrong-headed. First, the modern state, with its notion of 'absolute sovereign power', finds the notion of participation 'alien'. Not surprisingly, Milbank partly blames Arnold's disdain for local government and corporate associations, both of which stymie centralized state sovereignty. Second, a *paideia* can only be sustained by a shared tradition, which the state does not possess, and works to undermine.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, Milbank believes that statecraft and the desire for political participation works in supporting the state, irrespective of the position advocated. At one point, he faults Gutiérrez for being 'mainly interested in securing inner-ecclesiastical rights to political comment and involvement' which has the effect of endorsing a 'notion of a realm of secular autonomy guarded by human creative power, without realising that this is to subscribe to the very model which from Grotius and Hobbes onwards makes possible the notion of an autonomous natural law.'⁶⁸ Such a call from Gutiérrez in favour of statecraft needs to be placed in the context of Latin America, where systematic exclusion from participation in power structures is correlated with poverty, oppression, and torture. Yet in Milbank's opinion, statecraft, or participation in the secular, is profane because it helps to reproduce the secular

62. Craig, "Naves and Nukes," 335-336, 348, 353-354.

63. John Milbank, "The Invocation of Clio," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 215.

64. *Ibid.*, 216.

65. *Ibid.*, 216. Milbank finds in Proudhon a willingness to accept a coordinating rôle for the state; see: "Were the 'Christian Socialists' Socialists?" in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 66.

66. Milbank, "Invocation of Clio," 216.

67. Milbank, "Religion, Culture, and Anarchy," 32-33. 'Paideia' can be understood as a rounded system of education designed to educate people to flourish in the cultural and public life of society.

68. Milbank, "Essay against Secular Order," 206.

state. Statecraft indirectly supports the violence and coercion of the state and helps to justify its sovereignty. For Milbank, it is better to be political through the development of pluralism and its intermediate organisations.

Yet it is not entirely clear, in Milbank's formulation of the means by which this is done, whether he escapes this problem of supporting the profane state. Previous chapters have already outlined the challenge to state sovereignty that Milbank believes can come through the Big Society, based on recycling the ideas of the English pluralists and distributists.⁶⁹ But when Milbank describes how this transition is to happen, he is unable to avoid the means of the state to bring about this new socialist society. In one of Milbank's more recent essays, written as part of a Christian response to the 'credit crunch' and financial collapse of 2008, he directly advocates political and social activism, some of which involves statecraft. In his seven proposals, Milbank directly calls for 'Anti-usury legislation', 'just prices and just wages' that would fall under the purview of the 'law courts', 'free guilds' which do not restrict trade (presumably requiring anti-trust laws), welfare provision through 'state-aided voluntary bodies', localist 'de-proletarianism and re-professionalism' against centralized statism (presumably implemented by legislative change), and business participation in political governance ('Christians should recommend that the House of Lords be reformed as a representative body of corporations – businesses, religions, universities, trade unions etc. and not as a second House of Commons.').⁷⁰ A problem for Milbank with these suggestions is that statecraft is required for moving from where we are now to where he wishes us to be. So while the state is part of his diagnosis of the problem, the state is also part of his solution.

While there is no doubt some merit in his proposals, another of Milbank's ideas appears contradictory. Following Hilaire Belloc's distributism, he proposes a move toward 'distributist socialism' which necessarily entails the breaking up of concentrated economic power. This follows a similar path to the undermining of state sovereignty through intermediate associations.⁷¹ But here, Milbank is thin on detail. However, while some of the aforementioned associations, such as credit unions, will wield economic power, drawing some power away from large multinational banks, this is not yet proved a tangible challenge to the vast inequalities of wealth and its accumulation in the hands of the super-rich. Many people are still likely to think that to make serious gains towards greater economic equality will require state power to disinherit the wealthy and to transfer both the possibility and actuality of wealth and property to the lower classes.

69. It remains a question whether the advocacy of the 'Big Society' by Prime Minister David Cameron is an example of complex space 'detached from socialism' and 'colonized by the political right', Milbank, "On Complex Space," 272.

70. Milbank, "Real Third Way," 83–84. Milbank's final suggestion on 'The primacy of land' would seem to have no obvious implications for state activism, save for not enclosing any more of it, perhaps through the state putting land into the national estate and available for all to use.

71. See *ibid.*, 54.

Milbank's dialectical interrelationship of church and state is further developed in his commentary on Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. Milbank reads Benedict as insisting that welfare is properly the work of the Church, and should not be abdicated to the state.⁷² Milbank's target at this point are the 'neoconservative supporters' of rightist world leaders who wish to see the privatization of welfare or faith-based initiatives replacing state welfare. Milbank wishes to disallow this interpretation of *Deus Caritas Est*, applauding the affirmation of Benedict's willingness for the Church's 'collaboration with state and international agencies pursuing the genuine human good in every respect.'⁷³ Yet such a task must be infused with charity, which only comes from the church. The state can never displace the church in justice, since true justice is not based in secular reason, or in calculation of what is owed to whom, but is necessarily transcendent.

Milbank's hope is that a political ecclesiology and a redevelopment of intermediary associations, such as cooperatives, mutual banks, housing associations, and credit unions, would render the need for 'reactive State "redistribution"' mostly redundant.⁷⁴ This anti-statist political action would be subversive from without, rendering much of the existing welfare state functions and power irrelevant. This may be understood as a clear return to the pre-modern form of politics, or as a reiteration of early twentieth-century pluralism. But, at the level proposed, it is likely to leave the boundaries of states intact and the power of the military unhindered. This would not, as Milbank hopes, bring about a 'break-up of central sovereignty through the operation of intermediary associations.'⁷⁵ One reason for this is because of the connection between internal state power and the international state system, with intermediary associations, even trans-national ones, posing no real threat to this world order.

Milbank is opposed to the state, but also wishes to use it, even though this will reinforce it. Reinforcing the state is intrinsic to any strategy that uses of the means of the state as the way to bring about a socialist society. In conclusion, we find Milbank shunning statecraft for legitimating the state, while at the same time he finds the state useful for implementing his alternative third way between the exploitative market and profane state. While some might see here a dialectic running through Milbank's assessment of statecraft, or perhaps a flat-out contradiction, it might be that, on this issue, his thought has evolved over time. The problem is that in his more abstract philosophical moments Milbank seems utterly opposed to the state and statecraft. When dealing with concrete situations or the real positions of others he appears more willing to concede to the state some limited rôle. An explanation of

72. John Milbank, "The Future of Love: A Reading of Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 368.

73. Ibid., 369.

74. Milbank, "Grandeur of reason," 401.

75. Ibid., 401.

this is that Milbank's position has changed over time. If we compare one of his most strident anti-statist writings with a recent piece which endorses state involvement, there is 23 years between them.⁷⁶

Another clue to solving the problem of limited statecraft in Milbank could be his discipleship of Belloc. In his essay, 'The Real Third Way', Milbank favourably cites Belloc's *An Essay on the Restoration of Property*. Belloc writes that, 'The evil from which we are suffering today is not the evil of State interference but the evil of the loss of Freedom.'⁷⁷ He goes on to suggest that, 'All the powers of the State have been invoked by Capitalism to restore servile conditions; we shall not react against servile conditions unless we avail ourselves of the same methods.'⁷⁸ In the same work, Belloc also writes that 'Parliaments are necessarily the organs of plutocracy' and there is little hope for positive economic reform until 'political power is decentralized and rearranged according to economic classes and interests.'⁷⁹ These short quotations are enough to show that we find the same confusion in Belloc as we find in Milbank: a necessity to break the absolute sovereignty of the state that has been used for capitalist ends, but a willingness to use the same state for the introduction of a distributist agenda.

Cavanaugh's Undermining of Christian Statecraft

Since Cavanaugh's position is more anarchist than Milbank's, we would expect more scepticism from him about statecraft. To reiterate his position, Cavanaugh sees the state as something like an Antichrist figure, since its evil origins in violence means that it can only be sustained through violence, and beget violence in turn. The state, in its final mimicry of the triune God, offers a false salvation through the reunification of fallen humanity into the Leviathan or body politic. For this reason, and more so than Milbank, Cavanaugh is an out-and-out rejectionist of the state. But, rather than rejecting politics, which he remains committed to, he redefines politics in non-statist terms.

Cavanaugh's criticism of modern Christian political thinkers is that they conceive of political space as a single city characterized by a division of labour between church and state. In this regard, he is especially critical of positions he links to Martin E. Marty and John Courtney Murray: that church and state exist within one political space.⁸⁰ To Cavanaugh, seeing the city as unitary shapes the political imagination in ways that reinforce politics as statecraft, since within the one city politics is handled by the state, while the church looks after the soul. He writes that, 'There is one *polis* which the church can seek to rule, flee, serve, advise, or transform.'⁸¹ Understood

76. Here the comparison is between Milbank, "Essay against Secular Order." and Milbank, "Real Third Way."

77. Belloc, *Restoration of Property*, 38.

78. Ibid., 39. Also see p. 56.

79. Ibid., 96.

80. Cavanaugh, "From One City to Two," 299–308.

81. Ibid., 308.

in this way, the church is not intrinsically political, but takes 'political' actions in making policy recommendations to politicians. Within this one city, the church and state 'must manoeuvre for space', with two ends of the church-state spectrum being Constantinianism (the church using the state to rule the city), and the sectarian solution (for the church to try to live apart from the city).⁸² This is a source of statecraft: the church relating to the state within the one city, which contains a single political body – the state. But, for Cavanaugh, the church's acceptance of the one city and its rôle of statecraft within it makes for a much diminished political rôle for the church. On this model, statecraft takes for granted the church seeing itself as existing in a *spatial* relationship to the state. It identifies the state as *the* political body in the world, while the church can be political only in relation to the state within this space. Cavanaugh's project is to free the church from this way of imagining politics. Cavanaugh tries to break this impasse by using Augustine's notion of the two cities, and opposing Pope Gelasius I as the divider of the one city into two realms.⁸³ For Cavanaugh, it is Augustine who saves us from this spatial division in which the church must find its place, by suggesting that two cities are performances within the same time that enact their different loves, whether of self, or of God.⁸⁴

Cavanaugh also attacks a commonplace impetus for Christian statecraft: that the state should promote the common good and social justice. A strong motivation for statecraft is Christian action for one's neighbour, based in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). This parable has inspired a variety of methods of neighbourly care, including individual charity, church social services, and public bodies ranging from cooperatives to the modern welfare state.⁸⁵ Charity directed at the victims of bad luck, indebtedness, poverty, or accident has also been matched by the desire to strike out the root causes of social misery. Often, this call for social justice has taken the path of statecraft, through promoting legislation to alleviate social injustice. Christians have traditionally understood that people and their rulers should promote justice, peace, the common good, and other divine goods for the human life. Likewise, the Church has understood its rôle as promoting God's justice and peace to the nations. For Christians who believe that the state has responsibility for these things, it is only natural that they advocate these to the state for greater attention. A part of Cavanaugh's criticism of statecraft is his undermining of the idea that the common good is the responsibility of the state. But, before looking into Cavanaugh's critique of the common good, a parallel objection to the notion of justice from the pen of his mentor, Stanley Hauerwas, will be briefly surveyed. By relocating these

82. Cavanaugh, "From One City to Two," 308.

83. *Ibid.*, 309.

84. *Ibid.*, 311.

85. Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 157–187. For an argument linking the Good Samaritan with the welfare state, see Alec Pemberton, "Rescuing the Good Samaritan: An Exposition and a Defence of the Samaritan Principle in the Welfare State," *Journal of Social Policy* 19, no. 3 (1990): 281–298.

concepts inside the church, they undermine action for these goods in and through the state, making statecraft not only pointless, but also counter-productive.

All Christians are in favour of justice, with many seeking to promote their understanding of justice to the state for the alleviation of poverty and other social ills (often justified by Micah 6:8 and Amos 5:24). Such an emphasis on 'justice' has been severely criticized by Hauerwas in his provocatively-titled article 'The Politics of Justice: Why Justice Is a Bad Idea for Christians'.⁸⁶ His opinion is that, in the absence of a coherent account of justice, Christians have latched onto liberal justice that competes with, and undermines, Christianity. Or, in his words: 'Christians allow their imaginations to be captured by concepts of justice determined by the presuppositions of liberal societies, and as a result, contribute to the development of societies that make substantive accounts of justice less likely.'⁸⁷ Such societies are bureaucratic states, which limit our freedom and distort our humanity. Hauerwas also suggests that cries for justice are counter-productive in this way: 'Christian appeals to justice on behalf of the poor and needy may only reinforce those practices that are implicated in the creation of poverty in our society'.⁸⁸ In other words, not everything called 'justice' is what Christians ought to affirm as justice. Early in his essay, Hauerwas implies that generalized calls for justice help to legitimate the nation-state.⁸⁹ Regrettably, Hauerwas is vague on these points, for it is not explicit which 'practices' are being judged here, or how the nation-state is being legitimized. Perhaps he means something like this: if Christians endorse a warped or liberal view of what justice is, then it follows that any link between this justice and the state that follows from it will also result in an unsound appreciation of what the state is meant to do. The Christian understanding of justice and the state are intertwined and open to distortion by the culture of modernity, which has an alternative story to tell. If theology and liberalism cannot agree on the nature of justice, it is dubitable whether they can agree on the essence and purpose of the state. Although he does not cite this text, his criticisms of justice could be summarized by Proverbs 29:26: 'Many seek the favor of a ruler, but it is from the LORD that one gets justice.' Or, in the words of one commentary on this verse, a man gets justice 'by waiting in trust for Yahweh to give it to him, and not by lobbying a ruler.'⁹⁰

Along with justice, many theologians hold the state responsible for the common good, as Cavanaugh rightly observes.⁹¹ This is also the official position of the Catholic Church, which is based on a long pre-modern tradition with roots in Aristotle and

86. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of Justice: Why Justice is a Bad Idea for Christians," in *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 45–68.

87. *Ibid.*, 68.

88. *Ibid.*, 49.

89. *Ibid.*, 48, 65.

90. William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 639.

91. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 243.

Aquinas.⁹² That the state's rôle is to promote the common good is also, in the opinion of Cavanaugh, part of the state's own political imagination and how it wishes to present itself.⁹³ Yet, Cavanaugh, following his mentor's example on justice, wishes to present the 'case against seeing the state as the promoter and protector of the common good.'⁹⁴

In his disavowal of this important part of Catholic teaching on the rôle of the state Cavanaugh finds supporting evidence from historical sources. In Joseph Strayer's *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, he finds that the origins of the state made no allowance for the common good.⁹⁵ And from political philosophy, Cavanaugh takes the view that the state is now neutral toward the good, meaning that 'The body politic does not pursue a common good, but seeks to liberate the individual to pursue his or her own ends.'⁹⁶ This is the result of the contractarianism of Hobbes and Locke, but the story of the state's relationship to the common good is much more complex than a reification of social contract theories of the state would suggest. So, in his investigation into the assumption that the state is a keeper of the common good, his search for the origins of this view begin and end in the modern period, ignoring the Aristotelian and Thomist roots of this notion.⁹⁷

Cavanaugh acknowledges that the state can promote some goods, but writes that the 'nation-state is simply not in the common good business.'⁹⁸ The problem for the church, according to Cavanaugh, is when it believes the state's false claims that it can provide for the common good. Cavanaugh here cites Alasdair MacIntyre approvingly:

The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf . . . it is like being asked to die for the telephone company.⁹⁹

MacIntyre may be right that this is what the state has become, but does it follow that the state can no longer be a keeper of the common good, and should be treated like a utility company, or worse? Cavanaugh, by looking at the specifically liberal modern state, can easily ignore the pre-modern tradition in which politics was supposed to aim

92. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), §1910.

93. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 254, 266.

94. *Ibid.*, 244.

95. *Ibid.*, 247.

96. *Ibid.*, 254.

97. See Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Also see p. 92 above.

98. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 266.

99. From Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to my Critics," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 303. Cited in Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 263.

at the good. It is widely agreed that the modern neutral state has foregone any idea of a common good as *telos*, but this does not mean that the state is good for nothing, or that the notion of the common good has nothing to contribute to where the state may go in the future. Gary Dorrien, in writing of Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism of the notion of social justice, makes this criticism, which could also apply to Cavanaugh:

This disparagement of the "good society" idea was costly for Christian ethics . . . To let go of it is to undercut the struggle for attainable gains toward social justice, negating the elusive but formative vision of what is worth struggling for. Without a vision of a good society that transcends the prevailing order, ethics and politics remain captive to the dominant order, restricted to marginal reforms.¹⁰⁰

Here Dorrien indicates what effects Hauerwas's and Cavanaugh's criticisms may have: undercutting attempts to direct the state toward greater justice or the common good. To be fair to Cavanaugh, he does not give up the notion of the good altogether; he simply believes that it resides in the church. Or, rather, it is *the* good that the church pursues. Cavanaugh recognises that the two cities pursue different goods, and even share some in common, but because these goods in common are used for different ends, there is no common good between the two cities, which are governed by different notions of the good. By wanting to have two cities, rather than one in which church and state have different rôles, Cavanaugh encourages the notion that the *telos* and the rôles of the two cities becomes distinct.

Milbank is also sceptical about locating the common good in the state, locating it among 'communities'.¹⁰¹ In this he is more in line with Catholic social teaching, in which it is not only the political authorities that aim at the common good, but also individuals and intermediate institutions. Christian thought affirms that the common good exists within and through all social factors: individuals, communities, and the state. *Rerum Novarum* reads: 'But although all citizens, without exception, can and ought to contribute to that common good in which individuals share so profitably to themselves, yet it is not to be supposed that all can contribute in the same way and to the same extent.'¹⁰² Just as it is recognized that individuals will make a range of contributions in proportion with their abilities, perhaps it is also the case that the state's special concern for the common good is because of its power and means of doing so, rather than an ideological affirmation that this should be so. The notion of the common good remains central to Christian political thought, but it is a caricature of Christian social thinking that it believes it is the sole domain of the state. Traditionally,

100. Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 676.

101. Milbank, "Religion, Culture, and Anarchy," 33.

102. Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," §34. Also see Pope John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris," Vatican, April 11, 1963, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html> (accessed April 23, 2013), §53–66.

seeking the common good is the task for all parts of the social body. But with the rise of the state and the depoliticization of the church as having direct political involvement, it is hardly surprising that the responsibility for the common good is largely projected onto the state.

Finally, in response to Hauerwas and Cavanaugh, it is not enough to say that liberal notions of justice and the statist form of the common good render void the use of these motivational and aspirational concepts in the church. To do so would concede that Christianity has suffered a major defeat at the hands of modern liberalism. While this may be partly true, the church teaches that God's good and justice will prevail, and it is to this that Christians can always testify in their worship and social witness. Furthermore, calls for social justice and care for the widow and orphan is a reminder to both states and the church that states which ignore pleas for justice sit under divine judgment. The case against politics as statecraft in Hauerwas and Cavanaugh are based in the conflict between the ideologies of modernity and the politics of the church as a politics in its own right. There is no space here for a fuller critique of their positions. But here we can observe that Scripture is noticeably absent from their accounts of politics.

For all his undermining of the basis of statecraft, and despite his professed 'anarchism', Cavanaugh does, surprisingly, allow some space for statecraft in his writings. But these are minor sections and vague asides, and are not central to his political theology. He affirms that, 'The church's job is to try to discern in each concrete circumstance how best to embody the politics of the cross in a suffering world.'¹⁰³ Elsewhere, he wishes to deny the claim that 'some forms of ad hoc cooperation with the government cannot be useful.'¹⁰⁴ In some of his writings, Cavanaugh does applaud some church engagement with the state. For instance, he praises the political actions of Cardinal Roger Mahony (which included advocacy to President George W. Bush).¹⁰⁵ But, generally speaking, he thinks that the 'role of the church is not merely to make policy recommendations to the state, but to embody a different sort of politics'.¹⁰⁶

Cavanaugh's final objection to statecraft is that it makes the church's political contribution to politics indirect through an assumption of the autonomy of politics from ecclesiology. Non-ecclesial, post-Christendom political theologies fail, in his view, for the indirect nature of their politics. Rather than imagine the church as a political entity in its own right, with direct political importance, he observes that, in trying to grapple with the political relevance of the church after Christendom,

103. Cavanaugh, "Church," 405.

104. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company," 266.

105. See William T. Cavanaugh, "Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Mobility and Identity in a Global Age," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 356.

106. Cavanaugh, "Church," 404.

the mainstream accepts the depoliticization of the church and the normativity of statecraft.¹⁰⁷ Statecraft is far too indirect for Cavanaugh:

In modern secular societies, however, political theologies tend to operate at an additional remove from the state, staking a claim to influence the state only through the activities of Christian citizens in civil society. Furthermore, most assume that, when addressing a pluralistic society, theology cannot be directly politicized, but must first be translated into some more publicly accessible form of discourse in order to have an influence in civil society.¹⁰⁸

Statecraft, on this account, involves a double remove from the politics of the church. First, the church becomes too indirectly political and then, second, its political language must be translated into the language of the state. Both of these have a profaning influence on the church's political imagination – we no longer see the church as political, but see the state as our saviour.

Overall, Milbank and Cavanaugh leave little room for the church to engage with the state, either as Christians holding office, or as advocates for greater justice and the common good. The remainder of this chapter will examine the basis for the church to engage in statecraft in order to recapture some ground for statecraft eroded by Milbank and Cavanaugh.

For Christian Statecraft

The remainder of this chapter will advocate for Christian statecraft, with the disclaimer that this is not the whole Christian understanding of theopolitics, as sometimes caricatured by its critics. The following argument, based largely in scripture, is that statecraft need not defile the Christian, either in holding office, or in seeking to influence office-holders. While one does not find the word 'statecraft' in scripture, just as one does not find the word 'state', what we do find in scripture and later traditions are many examples of God's people forming, working with, and confronting kings, Pharaohs, emperors, judges, and other political figures. These examples of relationships to political power can inform the church's political imagination when it comes to questions of statecraft in the twenty-first century. Before looking into some of the scriptural evidence in more detail, there are many scriptures which seem to offer a *prima facie* case for the positive value of statecraft in scripture, both from the side of the wise ruler, and from that of the prophet.

Firstly, from the side of the ruler, it is a good thing to seek counsel from wise advisers. The tradition of Christian political thought often followed the wisdom of

107. Cavanaugh states this problem in "Church," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 393.

108. *Ibid.*, 399.

Solomon in advising that rulers are wise to have good and varied counsel (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22).¹⁰⁹ Also observed was that failure to listen to the words of the prophets brings calamity.¹¹⁰ So, from the side of the ruler, it is sensible and necessary to have good counsel, and to repent when they see the error of their ways. An exemplar of such penitence is David, rebuked by Nathan for disposing of Uriah in order to have Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12).¹¹¹ Rulers ought to listen to good counsel and reject bad: ‘If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked’ (Proverbs 29:12).

Then, from the side of those who provide counsel to rulers, we find this encouragement: ‘With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones’ (Proverbs 25:15). But just because rulers ought to listen does not mean that the church always has something to say. It risks looking foolish in its haste to speak (Proverbs 29:20). The church needs to develop the wisdom of when to speak and when to be taciturn, following the advice of James 1:19, a verse which Augustine used to claim that Christians do not always have an obligation to speak or teach.¹¹² That speaking to rulers is valued within scripture is shown by those cases where God gave prophets words to speak. Examples include Moses, with God providing the message and medium for his advocacy to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10–17), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4–9). Another is Nehemiah, who quickly prays before speaking his request to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:4–5). Given that the words of such wise men are often directed to rulers, we are encouraged to study them and in turn offer such service as we are called to:

Do not slight the discourse of the sages,
but busy yourself with their maxims;
because from them you will learn discipline
and how to serve princes. (Sirach 8:8)

This tradition of statecraft is dominant in the churches, even if it is not theologically grounded. The next section considers the opposing position, that of non-involvement in state politics.

Ideological Non-involvement with the State

Today’s Christians have more freedom than the enslaved Joseph, Esther, or Daniel of biblical times. In the West, at least, there exists the choice whether or not to

109. See, for commentary on these and related verses, Sedulius Scottus, *De rectoribus Christianis (On Christian Rulers)*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 85; and, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*, ed. and trans. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 135–137.

110. Scottus, *De rectoribus Christianis*, 97. Scottus illustrates this point with the examples of Pharaoh (Exodus 14:23–28) and Antiochus (2 Maccabees 9:5–28).

111. See *ibid.*, 119–121.

112. Augustine, “Exposition of Psalm 139,” in *Expositions of the Psalms, 121–150*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Maria Boulding, The Works of Saint Augustine (New York: New City Press, 2004), 296.

be actively engaged with the state. We can choose isolationism, compromise, or something in between, with one's disposition to any one option influenced partly by our political context. In the increasingly politicized twentieth century, a strong sense of social responsibility developed in the church. One reason for this should give anti-nominalists pause for thought. If associations have legal personality, can they also have a 'Christian' personality, or can only individuals be Christian? That the social order could be more or less Christian lay at the heart of the developing notion of Christian responsibility for the social order. If individuals being Christians is a good thing, it is much better if our social institutions and law reflect the gospel too.¹¹³ But there has been a reaction against this worldly responsibility, as H. Richard Niebuhr outlines here:

The general tendency of the Church in the twentieth century has been toward a conception of social responsibility which virtually made it an agent of secular society. Under the circumstances it is not impossible that a strong countermovement will arise and that Christians will seek forms of church life that are independent of secular society not only in source but also in purpose. The true measure of the Church's responsibility is not to be found, however, by attending to either extreme or by seeking for a compromise position between them but rather by attending to the two aspects of Christian responsibility in the right way.¹¹⁴

With these words, Niebuhr effectively predicted the rejection of statecraft in favour of the political ecclesiologies represented by Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Hauerwas. Of course, they would reject the label 'isolationist' (or 'sectarian'), but this is only justified because their ecclesiology is politicized. They do not see social responsibility as being undertaken by the church through the organs of the state. To do this is to be worldly and secular.

What Niebuhr rejects here are the absolutist ethics of isolationism and the temptation of civil religion. Much political theology has been trying to find a middle way to traverse these dangers. What is desired is a way for the church to be both political and faithful, while not becoming intoxicated with political power. Cavanaugh aims to achieve this by locating the true politics inside the church. The church is political by being the church, without much concern about what the state is doing. Milbank, while affirming the tie between ecclesiology and politics, differs in locating politics among and within the associations of society, including the church. Both wish to be political, as this is what makes one relevant in today's world, where to be taken seriously one must be political in a discernible way.

113. For the development of this notion see Stanley Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 462–463, 465.

114. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," in *The Gospel, the Church and the World*, ed. Kenneth Scott Latourette (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 126.

Those, such as Milbank and Cavanaugh, who propose that the church not be involved with the state, can sometimes make it sound as though this is a virtue for all times. But sometimes obedience to the state and engagement with it might be the prudent course. For those opposed to the state, Jeremiah 27 makes for difficult reading. It is a hard text for, precisely at the point where we have to serve a foreign King, our 'prophets' tell us not to serve him. But these are false prophets, 'for they are prophesying a lie to you' (Jeremiah 27:10,14,16). For this reason, it comes as no surprise that Calvin used Jeremiah 27 as evidence for an ethic of obedience.¹¹⁵ A better name for the virtue upheld here might be *forbearance*, since the bondage is not eternal. As Brueggemann observes in Jeremiah 27, serving the empire is only *until*; meaning that it is 'penultimate' and provisional, until God's ultimate judgment of Babylon.¹¹⁶ Brueggemann's use of the word 'penultimate' is reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's use of the term. For Bonhoeffer, the state is the preserving, penultimate, and provisional order, which is relative to the ultimate order and rule of God. He writes, 'Ultimate and penultimate stand in mutually exclusive opposition. Christ is the destroyer and enemy of everything penultimate, and everything penultimate is the enemy of Christ.'¹¹⁷ If Bonhoeffer can be claimed for the cause of desacralization then this is based in the alteration of the human attitude toward the penultimate in light of eschatological expectation. This is supported in Scripture by 1 Corinthians 7:29–31:

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Here, those Corinthian Christians who deal with the world around them are not commanded by Paul to stop dealing with the world, but to change their attitude to it in the face of Christian eschatological expectation. This new understanding should shape our approach to dealing with the things of this world that are passing away or being redeemed to the glory of God. We are not to cling to them, nor put our hope in them, but their place in our lives is rightly relativized under the imminent return of Christ. As Reinhold Niebuhr states it: 'The final victory over man's disorder is God's and not ours; but we do have responsibility for proximate victories.'¹¹⁸ This limited notion of responsibility permits selective or occasional involvement with the state, the subject of the next section.

115. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.27.

116. Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108–109.

117. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 153.

118. See Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Christian Witness in the Social and National Order," in *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 111.

For Selective Involvement

Against Cavanaugh's withdrawal strategy, and Milbank's anti-statism, the position affirmed here favours the freedom of the Christian to engage with the state, provided that it does so in a fashion that leaves the state in its proper place. This is similar to the 'selective participation' commonly found in Anabaptism.¹¹⁹ One of the best known advocates of selective involvement is Stanley Hauerwas. Rejecting the extremes of both 'complete involvement' with, or 'complete withdrawal' from, the state – options he attributes to James Gustafson – Hauerwas circumspectly suggests that, 'The issue is how the church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation.'¹²⁰ Paul Ramsey, one of Hauerwas's regular interlocutors, advocated both 'selective (perhaps radical) withdrawal' and 'selective (perhaps deep) involvement', since each has its place in its own time.¹²¹ It is this occasional and contextual involvement that is defended here.

Selective participation requires discernment about how to select those moments at which to participate and then further thought and reflection over *how* to participate. Who can teach us this craft? Hauerwas says we need to learn from those who went before, the saints (*communio sanctorum*). Who does he think we learn about 'selective participation' from? In *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, Hauerwas and his collaborator Romand Coles give several examples of people living radical lives.¹²² But from the two main characters Hauerwas discusses (Will D. Campbell and Jean Vanier), there is more wisdom to be gained by avoiding statecraft than selectively engaging in it.

Hauerwas believes that, 'It obviously makes all the difference whether rulers are more nearly just if they are to receive support from Christians. I do not believe, however, that we know beforehand for all times and all places what set of procedures or practices will insure such justice.'¹²³ This is typical Hauerwasian rhetoric, which sets an impossibly high standard for the position he opposes. In this case, he demands that the practitioners of statecraft know in advance the universal conditions of justice. He is partly right: attention needs to be paid to the particularity of the situation. But this demand of Hauerwas's is far from satisfactory. He rarely hesitates to inform his audience how the rulers of America go about their business. In essay after essay, Hauerwas tells readers how the state seeks to rule, and the American form of

119. From a position he calls 'Anabaptist realism', John Redekop advocates 'selective involvement' or 'conscientious participation', *Politics Under God* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2007), 122, 124.

120. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living In Between* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 11. Hauerwas's italics.

121. Paul Ramsey, *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops' Pastoral Letter "In Defense of Creation"* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 142.

122. Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008).

123. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 13.

government is well-known. But even if we grant that we cannot know everything we need to in advance, it should be possible to look back into the past to discover if anyone's selective participation was exemplary in their own time. Not that this would necessarily provide models for our own time, but it is central to Hauerwas's Christian virtue ethics to uphold past Christians as exemplars for current practice. If Hauerwas cannot do this then it appears that his ethical framework can be called into serious question. For if the present Christian community cannot educate its members for future decisions and engagement with secular culture and politics, then it is of limited use as a training ground in Christian virtue.

Finally, Hauerwas thinks that trying to influence the government is 'corrupting'. In the following quotation there is near universal condemnation of statecraft, leaving little room for 'selective participation':

I have a quite critical attitude toward the Methodist lobbying effort in Washington. They think they're there to influence government. My own view is that they should think of themselves as spies who reside in Washington to report back to the troops what the sons of bitches are planning to do to us. The whole image of influencing government seems to me to be quite corrupting . . . I think nothing is more corrupting than the notion of citizens participating in a democracy because that gives you the idea that somehow we are the government.¹²⁴

Hauerwas, even though he affirms 'selective participation', still considers the state as profane along with Milbank and Cavanaugh. More nuanced than Hauerwas is the American Episcopal lay theologian William Stringfellow, another advocate of occasional participation. He writes on the theological grounding of advocacy on behalf of the victim in these words:

If the church is called to advocacy, in a biblical sense, as a way of expressing its imminent eschatological insight, then the church cannot withdraw or retreat or escape from political involvement; it cannot indulge equivocation or apathy or indifference . . . If in the witness of advocacy there be circumstances where the church, or some members of the body of the church, be found supporting incumbent political authority, that is a matter of temporary gratuity and not of stupid allegiance to secular thrones.¹²⁵

So for Stringfellow statecraft is temporary, fleeting, and displays no change in the church's ultimate allegiance. This is in agreement with the account of Christian

124. Personal correspondence from Hauerwas to Keith Graber Miller in Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 268n30.

125. Stringfellow, *Conscience & Obedience: The Politics of Romans 13 and Revelation 13 in Light of the Second Coming*, 97–98.

freedom advocated here: that one may engage in statecraft without compromising one's faith. Whereas for Hauerwas and Cavanaugh statecraft was profaning in the seduction of the political imagination, for Stringfellow participation need not profane us, but is an opportunity for witness. This is surely a much sounder account since it does not automatically assume the complete surrender of the church to statism when it engages in statecraft.

Freedom and Indifference

The 'indifference' Stringfellow rejects in the above quotation demands qualification. He is writing about callous indifference to the victims of oppression: the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned. Such indifference was shown by the priest and Levite to the robbed and beaten traveller in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). While indifference to the plight of the victim or downtrodden can never be sanctioned by the church, there are other forms of indifference in the realm of Christian freedom that can relate to the state and the Christian's use of it. One is the indifference that Christians maintain toward political form. This section will argue for indifference toward statecraft, meaning that Christian engagement with the state is *adiaphora*.

Being a matter of indifference, there are no scriptures relating directly to the use of statecraft, but there are passages that have *adiaphora* as a motif, especially the letters of Paul.¹²⁶ An example that relates to the state is Paul's statement that 'it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court' (1 Corinthians 4:3). Also consider 1 Corinthians 6:12: "'All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.' Utilizing this passage in a discussion of freedom in Paul, Ellul writes of the danger of losing our freedom in conforming to the 'Spirit of the World'. He writes the danger is two-fold:

It is the same when we think we can entrust ourselves to an objective system in order to assure "the" freedom of human beings: when we think that political or economic institutions will give freedom to people and will render them free, when we consider *that the obstacle to human freedom is*, for example, one [particular] authoritarian form of the State or economic alienation, then we ourselves lose our freedom.¹²⁷

As Ellul suggests, there are two dangers here. The first, as examined in Chapter 5, is that we risk thinking the state is our redeemer. The second is that we think of the state as standing objectively in the way of our redemption. Ellul suggests that

126. See James Jaquette, *Discerning What Counts: The Function of the Adiaphora Topos in Paul's Letters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

127. Jacques Ellul, "The Meaning of Freedom According to Saint Paul," in *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, ed. and trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 128–129. Square brackets in translation.

the Christian is free from such speculation over political means, sitting above such matters. To engage in such debates is a form of slavery to Christian morality, which he rejects in this text, with support from 1 Corinthians 7:23.¹²⁸

Elsewhere, Ellul argues against any binding doctrine of the state or defining true Christianity as withdrawal from engaging with the state.¹²⁹ If making the state a christ sacralizes it, and making it an antichrist profanes it, then acting freely toward the state both desacralizes and deprofanizes it from these two extremes and undermines the slavery of a strict Christian social ethic. As shown throughout the previous chapters, this is precisely the mistake that Milbank and Cavanaugh make when describing the state as profane. In a similar vein to Ellul, Will D. Campbell and James Y. Holloway write:

The dilemma of modernity and the apostasy of the Church are not resolved by anarchy—in trying to abjure political responsibility by casting politics as the one devil responsible for everything that ails us—any more than politics-as-Baal can redeem us. The time may be upon us when certain forms of political action, dear to those who glory in our 18th-century traditions, will have to be rejected—perhaps temporarily, perhaps permanently—in order to topple idols and thereby refocus upon political reality.¹³⁰

For Calvin, indifference is a part of Christian freedom: ‘regarding outward things that are of themselves “indifferent,” we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently.’¹³¹ As Calvin continues, matters of indifference free the conscience, which can free today’s Christian from any perceived duty (such as voting) to participate in the state. This only applies if the state is neither sacred nor profane; for if it is sacred, then to reject it would be neglecting one’s duty; while if the state is profane, to use it would be corrupting. Another Reformed way of looking at the matters of indifference is to describe them as those things treated as unnecessary for salvation.

An attitude of indifference to political form and statecraft, combined with the desacralization of the state, radically relativizes the state, and in putting it in its place reduces it to a tool which the Christian can approach without fear of profaning oneself. Naturally, while a Christian shouldn’t unduly worry about statecraft, they should approach it with caution, knowing that there may be unintended consequences of

128. Ellul, “The Meaning of Freedom,” 128. Recall, also, Bonhoeffer’s interpretation, see page 18 above.

129. Ellul outlines these three errors in detail in “Christian Faith and Social Reality,” in *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, ed. and trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 173–174.

130. Will D. Campbell and James Y. Holloway, *Up to Our Steeples in Politics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 69.

131. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.7.

statecraft – such as increased state power and greater intrusion of the state into our lives.

Conclusions

This final chapter has made a case for selective Christian statecraft. To establish the case for this, the chapter began with proposals for desacralizing the state from its being considered either sacred or profane. The state is neither the Christ nor the Antichrist. While it has been presented as such by both secular and religious thinkers, it is not our creator, preserver, nor redeemer. This does not mean that the state has no purpose in God's creative, preservative or redemptive work. Mature Christians must remain open to the possibilities that the state may have some place in God's plans for humanity and creation. This may require recasting the Christian political imagination, freeing the Christian to appreciate that both God and Christian are free to engage with the state. This position is supported by the reading of scripture which serves to demythologize and relativize the state.

This chapter has also examined calls from selected Radical Orthodoxy theologians for the church to shun statecraft. Proponents of this view discussed here include Bell, Hauerwas, Milbank, and Cavanaugh. They believe that to reduce politics to statecraft is to depoliticize the church, while giving theological support to the bureaucratic liberal state. As part of their protest against politics as statecraft, they have sought to recapture the concepts of justice and the common good as the sole preserve of the church. Their dismissal of statecraft rests largely on finding the state profane. The differences that remain between Milbank and Cavanaugh in their assessment of the state are not in the degree of its profanity, but in how close one can get to it. Whereas Cavanaugh wishes to keep a far distance, Milbank is prepared to work with it in order to undermine its absolute sovereignty.

Contrary to their position, this chapter advocates the view that the boundaries between sacred and profane are much more hazy in politics than Radical Orthodoxy would have us believe. Christians and churches can have faithful engagements with the state, with both scripture and tradition providing examples of how such relationships may be conducted in a spirit of Christian freedom. Scripture, in particular, has a more nuanced approach to relating to political powers, one which always emphasizes the absolute political power of God and the relative and penultimate power of human political power. The state and statecraft are in the realm of indifference, with neither participation nor non-participation being important for salvation.

From the church's perspective statecraft is about witnessing to God's rule of justice and peace. Christians should, therefore, always question whether these goods can be provided by the secular state alone. And in the situations in which we find ourselves,

and using our gifts, we can advocate in small ways for the common good and justice, as taught to us through God's revelation in Scripture.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This dissertation has assessed the political theologies of John Milbank and William Cavanaugh. The special focus throughout has been their view of the modern state, and secondarily the political ecclesiologies they pose as the locus of their politics in place of politics as statecraft. In offering a sustained account and criticism of their political theologies, a theological frame of reference was adopted which combined the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption with the notions of sacred and profane. This framework was used in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their positions on the state and to what extent they would be happy for Christian political strategies to include engagement with the state.

In general, their rejection of the politics of statecraft rely on showing how the state is profane and that the church is truly political in its own right. In depicting the profanity of the state, they rely on showing how it both parodies and competes with Christian doctrine. Assessing their positions, therefore, has been done by looking at their positions through the doctrines of creation, preservation, and redemption, in dialogue with Scripture and traditional Christian theological reflection on the civil authorities. In both Milbank and Cavanaugh, the political church largely rests in their close adherence to political pluralism, which seeks to undermine the sovereignty of the state, and claims the real personality of associations, including the church. Both Milbank and Cavanaugh propose that the church, in place of the profane state, is the true locus of politics. Arguments for this position have been outlined, and shortcomings in their approach have been highlighted.

In addition, each chapter offered a unique critique of their positions. Chapter 2 showed how Milbank and Cavanaugh have not escaped the movement toward the politicization of theology which began in the twentieth century. In constructing a political ecclesiology they also wish theology to be relevant to politics, which is a modern obsession in church and society. Chapter 3 saw how Milbank and Cavanaugh are selective in where they locate the origins of the state. This rhetorical strategy – to place the origins of the state where it suits one’s argument – is used by them to cast the state as profane by locating it in heretical philosophy and war. Chapter 4

highlights where Milbank and Cavanaugh differ from the mainstream tradition on the state. They ignore its function as an ordinance for the preservation of human society. Here, Milbank and Cavanaugh simply do not value the temporal goods of government, which is surprising, given that Augustine, one of their main primary sources, does. In Chapter 5 on redemption, Milbank and Cavanaugh showed that they see salvation *from* the political body of the state *into* the Body of Christ. They share the position that salvation is to be found in associations and the church. But, as shown, there are real problems with this. This three-fold doctrinal framework proved useful in evaluating a theology of the state against a common understanding of the works of God. It offers a powerful analytical tool for assessing political theologies and would be able to be used to critique secular political theories in the same way. In Chapter 6, we find that Milbank and Cavanaugh mostly condemn politics as statecraft, with Milbank adopting a strategy of using the state for moving toward pluralism, while Cavanaugh, being more anarchist, tries to undermine the Christian impetus for statecraft altogether. This is consistent with their position on the profanity of the state. But, as shown, they are too hasty in condemning statecraft.

In summary, the political theologians John Milbank and William Cavanaugh offer fresh ways to describe the relationship between the church and the state. They base this in the *mythos* or the theopolitical imagination Christians choose to adhere to: either the city of man, or the city of God. Their political Augustinianism results in their being very negative towards the state, making it a source of profanity in the life of the church.

This thesis has described their projects and taken them further in the demythologization of Christian political thought through the doctrinal lenses of creation, preservation, and redemption. This serves to desacralize sacred understandings of the state and also to deprofanize profane interpretations of the state. One traditional position Milbank and Cavanaugh heartily adopt is that in order to decide whether to engage with the state, we need to know what the state is. Because they view it as profane, they avoid it and wish to undermine it. They therefore reject statecraft because they see it as based in a statism that has exalted the state into the position of God. The argument here is largely in agreement with Milbank and Cavanaugh, that Christians must reject this idolatrous position. Regrettably, Milbank and Cavanaugh err at the other extreme, making the state profane, when a better position is to remain open to the possibility that God uses the human creation of the state and remains involved in its ongoing work.

Finally, in arguing for indifference to both political form and statecraft, this dissertation stands open to the objection of being non-committal to any practical and concrete politics. This is the result, however, of having maximal fidelity to a scriptural political imagination, and a theology of freedom. The conclusion is therefore negative, as described in these words of Bonhoeffer:

The church is not able to proclaim a concrete earthly order that would necessarily follow from faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, it can and must oppose any concrete order that represents an offense to faith in Jesus Christ, and this it can and must at least negatively define the boundaries of an order within which it is possible to believe in and to render obedience to Jesus Christ.¹

This *via negativa* is not only in relation to Jesus Christ, which that paragraph might suggest. God is the Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer of life, and it has been the argument throughout the foregoing chapters that anything, including political thought and action that produces a rival to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in any of these tasks, must be challenged by the church.² But we remain free to engage with the powers that exist.

Graham Ward writes it is not the rôle of the theologian to solve complex economic, political, or cultural problems. Rather, 'The theologian's task is to keep alive the vision of better things – of justice, salvation and the common good – and work to clarify the world-view conducive to the promotion of those things.'³ It is difficult to imagine Milbank and Cavanaugh disagreeing with Ward on this point. The differences would lie in the focal point of where justice and the common good is placed. Just where and to whom does the theologian perform this necessary task? It has been the argument here that the state *can* be a realm where the Christian voices can be heard. This does not mean that the church is a politics, but only that we cannot rule out statecraft as a way to witness to God and His Kingdom. Since we are free in Christ, statecraft need not defile us; but it can kill us, as the history of prophecy and martyrdom shows. Such is the risk of faithful evangelical political witness.

1. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 360.

2. *Ibid.*, 193.

3. Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 260.

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